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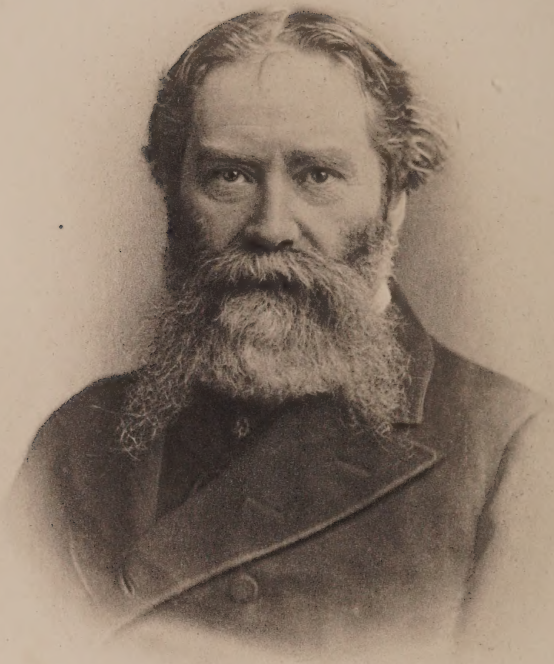
Elmwood Edition

THE COMPLETE WRITINGS OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

WITH PORTRAITS, ILLUSTRATIONS, AND FACSIMILES

IN SIXTEEN VOLUMES

VOLUME IV



AMONG MY BOOKS

BY

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

First and Second Series

13617

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOLUME II

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CONTENTS

NEW ENGLAND TWO CENTURIES AGO . 1
LESSING 89
ROUSSEAU AND THE SENTIMENTALISTS . 171
SPENSER 219

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL IN 1881 Frontispiece
From a photograph taken in England

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING . . . 92

JEAN JACQUES ROUSSEAU 174
From the painting by Allan Ramsay (1766) in the National Gallery, Edinburgh

EDMUND SPENSER 222
From the painting in the National Portrait Gallery, London

NEW ENGLAND TWO CENTURIES AGO

NEW ENGLAND TWO CENTURIES AGO[1]

1865

THE history of New England is written imperishably on the face of a continent, and in characters as beneficent as they are enduring. In the Old World national pride feeds itself with the record of battles and conquests; — battles which proved nothing and settled nothing; conquests which shifted a boundary on the map, and put one ugly head instead of another on the coin which the people paid to the tax-gatherer. But wherever the New Englander travels among the sturdy commonwealths which have sprung from the seed of the Mayflower, churches, schools, colleges, tell him where the men of his race have been, or their influence has penetrated; and an intelligent freedom is the monument of conquests whose results are not to be measured in square miles. Next to the fugitives whom Moses led out of Egypt, the little shipload of outcasts who landed

[1] *History of New England during the Stuart Dynasty.* By John Gorham Palfrey. Vol. iii.

Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society. Third Series, vols. ix. and x. Fourth Series, vols. vi. and vii.

at Plymouth two centuries and a half ago are destined to influence the future of the world. The spiritual thirst of mankind has for ages been quenched at Hebrew fountains; but the embodiment in human institutions of truths uttered by the Son of Man eighteen centuries ago was to be mainly the work of Puritan thought and Puritan self-devotion. Leave New England out in the cold! While you are plotting it, she sits by every fireside in the land where there is piety, culture, and free thought.

Faith in God, faith in man, faith in work, — this is the short formula in which we may sum up the teaching of the founders of New England, a creed ample enough for this life and the next. If their municipal regulations smack somewhat of Judaism, yet there can be no nobler aim or more practical wisdom than theirs; for it was to make the law of man a living counterpart of the law of God, in their highest conception of it. Were they too earnest in the strife to save their souls alive? That is still the problem which every wise and brave man is lifelong in solving. If the Devil take a less hateful shape to us than to our fathers, he is as busy with us as with them; and if we cannot find it in our hearts to break with a gentleman of so much worldly wisdom, who gives such admirable dinners, and whose manners are so perfect, so much the worse for us.

Looked at on the outside, New England history is dry and unpicturesque. There is no rustle of silks, no waving of plumes, no clink of golden spurs. Our sympathies are not awakened by the changeful destinies, the rise and fall, of great families, whose doom was in their blood. Instead of all this, we have the homespun fates of Cephas and Prudence repeated in an infinite series of peaceable sameness, and finding space enough for record in the family Bible; we have the noise of axe and hammer and saw, an apotheosis of dogged work, where, reversing the fairy-tale, nothing is left to luck, and, if there be any poetry, it is something that cannot be helped, — the waste of the water over the dam. Extrinsically, it is prosaic and plebeian; intrinsically, it is poetic and noble; for it is, perhaps, the most perfect incarnation of an idea the world has ever seen. That idea was not to found a democracy, nor to charter the city of New Jerusalem by an act of the General Court, as gentlemen seem to think whose notions of history and human nature rise like an exhalation from the good things at a Pilgrim Society dinner. Not in the least. They had no faith in the Divine institution of a system which gives Teague, because he can dig, as much influence as Ralph, because he can think, nor in personal at the expense of general freedom. Their view of human rights was not so

limited that it could not take in human relations and duties also. They would have been likely to answer the claim, "I am as good as anybody," by a quiet "Yes, for some things, but not for others; as good, doubtless, in your place, where all things are good." What the early settlers of Massachusetts *did* intend, and what they accomplished, was the founding here of a *new* England, and a better one, where the political superstitions and abuses of the old should never have leave to take root. So much, we may say, they deliberately intended. No nobles, either lay or cleric, no great landed estates, and no universal ignorance as the seed-plot of vice and unreason; but an elective magistracy and clergy, land for all who would till it, and reading and writing, will ye nill ye, instead. Here at last, it should seem, simple manhood is to have a chance to play his stake against Fortune with honest dice, uncogged by those three hoary sharpers, Prerogative, Patricianism, and Priestcraft. Whoever has looked into the pamphlets published in England during the Great Rebellion cannot but have been struck by the fact, that the principles and practice of the Puritan Colony had begun to react with considerable force on the mother country; and the policy of the retrograde party there, after the Restoration, in its dealings with New England, finds a curious parallel as to its motives (time will show

whether as to its results) in the conduct of the same party towards America during the last four years.[1] This influence and this fear alike bear witness to the energy of the principles at work here.

We have said that the details of New England history were essentially dry and unpoetic. Everything is near, authentic, and petty. There is no mist of distance to soften outlines, no mirage of tradition to give characters and events an imaginative loom. So much downright work was perhaps never wrought on the earth's surface in the same space of time as during the first forty years after the settlement. But mere work is unpicturesque, and void of sentiment. Irving instinctively divined and admirably illustrated in his "Knickerbocker" the humorous element which lies in this nearness of view, this clear, prosaic daylight of modernness, and this poverty of stage properties, which make the actors and the deeds they were concerned in seem ludicrously small when contrasted with the semi-mythic grandeur in which we have clothed them, as we look backward from the crowned result, and fancy a cause as majestic as our conception of the effect. There was, indeed, one poetic side to the existence otherwise so narrow and practical; and to have conceived this, however partially, is the one original and American

[1] Written in December, 1864.

thing in Cooper. This diviner glimpse illumines the lives of our Daniel Boones, the man of civilization and old-world ideas confronted with our forest solitudes, — confronted, too, for the first time, with his real self, and so led gradually to disentangle the original substance of his manhood from the artificial results of culture. Here was our new Adam of the wilderness, forced to name anew, not the visible creation of God, but the invisible creation of man, in those forms that lie at the base of social institutions, so insensibly moulding personal character and controlling individual action. Here is the protagonist of our New World epic, a figure as poetic as that of Achilles, as ideally representative as that of Don Quixote, as romantic in its relation to our homespun and plebeian mythus as Arthur in his to the mailed and plumed cycle of chivalry. We do not mean, of course, that Cooper's "Leatherstocking" is all this or anything like it, but that the character typified in him is ideally and potentially all this and more.

But whatever was poetical in the lives of the early New Englanders had something shy, if not sombre, about it. If their natures flowered, it was out of sight, like the fern. It was in the practical that they showed their true quality, as Englishmen are wont. It has been the fashion lately with a few feeble-minded persons to undervalue the New England Puritans, as if they

were nothing more than gloomy and narrow-minded fanatics. But all the charges brought against these large-minded and far-seeing men are precisely those which a really able fanatic, Joseph de Maistre, lays at the door of Protestantism. Neither a knowledge of human nature nor of history justifies us in confounding, as is commonly done, the Puritans of Old and New England, or the English Puritans of the third with those of the fifth decade of the seventeenth century. Fanaticism, or, to call it by its milder name, enthusiasm, is only powerful and active so long as it is aggressive. Establish it firmly in power, and it becomes conservatism, whether it will or no. A sceptre once put in the hand, the grip is instinctive; and he who is firmly seated in authority soon learns to think security, and not progress, the highest lesson of statecraft. From the summit of power men no longer turn their eyes upward, but begin to look about them. Aspiration sees only one side of every question; possession, many. And the English Puritans, after their revolution was accomplished, stood in even a more precarious position than most successful assailants of the prerogative of whatever *is* to continue in being. They had carried a political end by means of a religious revival. The fulcrum on which they rested their lever to overturn the existing order of things (as history always placidly calls the par-

ticular forms of *dis*order for the time being) was in the soul of man. They could not renew the fiery gush of enthusiasm when once the molten metal had begun to stiffen in the mould of policy and precedent. The religious element of Puritanism became insensibly merged in the political; and, its one great man taken away, it died, as passions have done before, of possession. It was one thing to shout with Cromwell before the battle of Dunbar, "Now, Lord, arise, and let thine enemies be scattered!" and to snuffle, "Rise, Lord, and keep us safe in our benefices, our sequestered estates, and our five per cent!" Puritanism meant something when Captain Hodgson, riding out to battle through the morning mist, turns over the command of his troop to a lieutenant, and stays to hear the prayer of a cornet, there was "so much of God in it." Become traditional, repeating the phrase without the spirit, reading the present backward as if it were written in Hebrew, translating Jehovah by "I was" instead of "I am," —it was no more like its former self than the hollow drum made of Zisca's skin was like the grim captain whose soul it had once contained. Yet the change was inevitable, for it is not safe to confound the things of Cæsar with the things of God. Some honest republicans, like Ludlow, were never able to comprehend the chilling contrast between the ideal aim and the material

fulfilment, and looked askance on the strenuous reign of Oliver, — that rugged boulder of primitive manhood lying lonely there on the dead level of the century, — as if some crooked changeling had been laid in the cradle instead of that fair babe of the Commonwealth they had dreamed. Truly there is a tide in the affairs of men, but there is no gulf-stream setting forever in one direction ; and those waves of enthusiasm on whose crumbling crests we sometimes see nations lifted for a gleaming moment are wont to have a gloomy trough before and behind.

But the founders of New England, though they must have sympathized vividly with the struggles and triumphs of their brethren in the mother country, were never subjected to the same trials and temptations, never hampered with the same lumber of usages and tradition. They were not driven to win power by doubtful and desperate ways, nor to maintain it by any compromises of the ends which make it worth having. From the outset they were builders, without need of first pulling down, whether to make room or to provide material. For thirty years after the colonization of the Bay, they had absolute power to mould as they would the character of their adolescent commonwealth. During this time a whole generation would have grown to manhood who knew the Old World

only by report, in whose habitual thought kings, nobles, and bishops would be as far away from all present and practical concern as the figures in a fairy-tale, and all whose memories and associations, all their unconscious training by eye and ear, were New English wholly. Nor were the men whose influence was greatest in shaping the framework and the policy of the Colony, in any true sense of the word, fanatics. Enthusiasts, perhaps, they were, but with them the fermentation had never gone further than the ripeness of the vinous stage. Disappointment had never made it acetous, nor had it ever putrefied into the turbid zeal of Fifth Monarchism and sectarian whimsey. There is no better ballast for keeping the mind steady on its keel, and saving it from all risk of *crankiness*, than business. And they were business men, men of facts and figures no less than of religious earnestness. The sum of two hundred thousand pounds had been invested in their undertaking, — a sum, for that time, truly enormous as the result of private combination for a doubtful experiment. That their enterprise might succeed, they must show a balance on the right side of the counting-house ledger, as well as in their private accounts with their own souls. The liberty of praying when and how they would must be balanced with an ability of paying when and as they ought. Nor is the resulting fact in

this case at variance with the *a priori* theory. They succeeded in making their thought the life and soul of a body politic, still powerful, still benignly operative, after two centuries; a thing which no mere fanatic ever did or ever will accomplish. Sober, earnest, and thoughtful men, it was no Utopia, no New Atlantis, no realization of a splendid dream, which they had at heart, but the establishment of the divine principle of Authority on the common interest and the common consent; the making, by a contribution from the free will of all, a power which should curb and guide the free will of each for the general good. If they were stern in their dealings with sectaries, it should be remembered that the Colony was in fact the private property of the Massachusetts Company, that unity was essential to its success, and that John of Leyden had taught them how unendurable by the nostrils of honest men is the corruption of the right of private judgment in the evil and selfish hearts of men when no thorough mental training has developed the understanding and given the judgment its needful means of comparison and correction. They knew that liberty in the hands of feeble-minded and unreasoning persons (and all the worse if they are honest) means nothing more than the supremacy of their particular form of imbecility; means nothing less, therefore, than downright chaos, a

Bedlam-chaos of monomaniacs and bores. What was to be done with men and women, who bore conclusive witness to the fall of man by insisting on walking up the broad aisle of the meeting-house in a costume which that event had put forever out of fashion? About their treatment of witches, too, there has been a great deal of ignorant babble. Puritanism had nothing whatever to do with it. They acted under a delusion, which, with an exception here and there (and those mainly medical men, like Wierus and Webster), darkened the understanding of all Christendom. Dr. Henry More was no Puritan; and his letter to Glanvil, prefixed to the third edition of the "Sadducismus Triumphatus," was written in 1678, only fourteen years before the trials at Salem. Bekker's "Bezauberte Welt" was published in 1693; and in the Preface he speaks of the difficulty of overcoming "the prejudices in which not only ordinary men, but the learned also, are obstinate." In Hathaway's case, 1702, Chief-Justice Holt, in charging the jury, expresses no disbelief in the possibility of witchcraft, and the indictment implies its existence. Indeed, the natural reaction from the Salem mania of 1692 put an end to belief in devilish compacts and demoniac possessions sooner in New England than elsewhere. The last we hear of it there is in 1720, when the Rev. Mr. Turell of Medford detected and

exposed an attempted cheat by two girls. Even in 1692, it was the foolish breath of Cotton Mather and others of the clergy that blew the dying embers of this ghastly superstition into a flame; and they were actuated partly by a desire to bring about a religious revival, which might stay for a while the hastening lapse of their own authority, and still more by that credulous scepticism of feeble-minded piety which dreads the cutting away of an orthodox tumor of misbelief, as if the life-blood of faith would follow, and would keep even a stumbling-block in the way of salvation, if only enough generations had tripped over it to make it venerable. The witches were condemned on precisely the same grounds that in our day led to the condemnation of "Essays and Reviews."

But Puritanism was already in the decline when such things were possible. What had been a wondrous and intimate experience of the soul, a flash into the very crypt and basis of man's nature from the fire of trial, had become ritual and tradition. In prosperous times the faith of one generation becomes the formality of the next. "The necessity of a reformation," set forth by order of the Synod which met at Cambridge in 1679, though no doubt overstating the case, shows how much even at that time the ancient strictness had been loosened. The country had grown rich, its commerce was large, and

wealth did its natural work in making life softer and more worldly, commerce in deprovincializing the minds of those engaged in it. But Puritanism had already done its duty. As there are certain creatures whose whole being seems occupied with an egg-laying errand they are sent upon, incarnate ovipositors, their bodies but bags to hold this precious deposit, their legs of use only to carry them where they may most safely be rid of it, so sometimes a generation seems to have no other end than the conception and ripening of certain germs. Its blind stirrings, its apparently aimless seeking hither and thither, are but the driving of an instinct to be done with its parturient function toward these principles of future life and power. Puritanism, believing itself quick with the seed of religious liberty, laid, without knowing it, the egg of democracy. The English Puritans pulled down church and state to rebuild Zion on the ruins, and all the while it was not Zion, but America, they were building. But if their millennium went by, like the rest, and left men still human ; if they, like so many saints and martyrs before them, listened in vain for the sound of that trumpet which was to summon all souls to a resurrection from the body of this death which men call life, — it is not for us, at least, to forget the heavy debt we owe them. It was the drums of Naseby and Dunbar that gathered the minute-men on Lexington

Common; it was the red dint of the axe on Charles's block that marked One in our era. The Puritans had their faults. They were narrow, ungenial; they could not understand the text, "I have piped to you and ye have not danced," nor conceive that saving one's soul should be the cheerfullest, and not the dreariest, of businesses. Their preachers had a way, like the painful Mr. Perkins, of pronouncing the word *damn* with such an emphasis as left a doleful echo in their auditors' ears a good while after. And it was natural that men who captained or accompanied the exodus from existing forms and associations into the doubtful wilderness that led to the promised land, should find more to their purpose in the Old Testament than in the New. As respects the New England settlers, however visionary some of their religious tenets may have been, their political ideas savored of the reality, and it was no Nephelococcygia of which they drew the plan, but of a commonwealth whose foundation was to rest on solid and familiar earth. If what they did was done in a corner, the results of it were to be felt to the ends of the earth; and the figure of Winthrop should be as venerable in history as that of Romulus is barbarously grand in legend.

I am inclined to think that many of our national characteristics, which are sometimes

attributed to climate and sometimes to institutions, are traceable to the influences of Puritan descent. We are apt to forget how very large a proportion of our population is descended from emigrants who came over before 1660. Those emigrants were in great part representatives of that element of English character which was most susceptible of religious impressions; in other words, the most earnest and imaginative. Our people still differ from their English cousins (as they are fond of calling themselves when they are afraid we may do them a mischief) in a certain capacity for enthusiasm, a devotion to abstract principle, an openness to ideas, a greater aptness for intuitions than for the slow processes of the syllogism, and, as derivative from these, in minds of looser texture, a light-armed, skirmishing habit of thought, and a positive preference of the birds in the bush, — an excellent quality of character *before* you have your bird in the hand.

There have been two great distributing centres of the English race on this continent, Massachusetts and Virginia. Each has impressed the character of its early legislators on the swarms it has sent forth. Their ideas are in some fundamental respects the opposites of each other, and we can only account for it by an antagonism of thought beginning with the early framers of their respective institutions. New England

abolished caste; in Virginia they still talk of "quality folks." But it was in making education not only common to all, but in some sense compulsory on all, that the destiny of the free republics of America was practically settled. Every man was to be trained, not only to the use of arms, but of his wits also; and it is these which alone make the others effective weapons for the maintenance of freedom. You may disarm the hands, but not the brains, of a people, and to know what should be defended is the first condition of successful defence. Simple as it seems, it was a great discovery that the key of knowledge could turn both ways, that it could open, as well as lock, the door of power to the many. The only things a New Englander was ever locked out of were the jails. It is quite true that our Republic is the heir of the English Commonwealth; but as we trace events backward to their causes, we shall find it true also, that what made our Revolution a foregone conclusion was that act of the General Court, passed in May, 1647, which established the system of common schools. "To the end that learning may not be buried in the graves of our forefathers in Church and Commonwealth, the Lord assisting our endeavors, it is therefore ordered by this Court and authority thereof, that every township in this jurisdiction, after the Lord hath increased them to fifty householders, shall then

forthwith appoint one within their towns to teach all such children as shall resort to him to write and read."

Passing through some Massachusetts village, perhaps at a distance from any house, it may be in the midst of a piece of woods where four roads meet, one may sometimes even yet see a small square one-story building, whose use would not be long doubtful. It is summer, and the flickering shadows of forest-leaves dapple the roof of the little porch, whose door stands wide, and shows, hanging on either hand, rows of straw hats and bonnets, that look as if they had done good service. As you pass the open windows, you hear whole platoons of high-pitched voices discharging words of two or three syllables with wonderful precision and unanimity. Then there is a pause, and the voice of the officer in command is heard reproving some raw recruit whose vocal musket hung fire. Then the drill of the small infantry begins anew, but pauses again because some urchin — who agrees with Voltaire that the superfluous is a very necessary thing — insists on spelling "subtraction" with an *s* too much.

If you had the good fortune to be born and bred in the Bay State, your mind is thronged with half-sad, half-humorous recollections. The a-b abs of little voices long since hushed in the mould, or ringing now in the pulpit, at the bar,

or in the Senate-chamber, come back to the ear of memory. You remember the high stool on which culprits used to be elevated with the tall paper fool's-cap on their heads, blushing to the ears; and you think with wonder how you have seen them since as men climbing the world's penance-stools of ambition without a blush, and gladly giving everything for life's caps and bells. And you have pleasanter memories of going after pond-lilies, of angling for horn-pouts, — that queer bat among the fishes, — of nutting, of walking over the creaking snow-crust in winter, when the warm breath of every household was curling up silently in the keen blue air. You wonder if life has any rewards more solid and permanent than the Spanish dollar that was hung around your neck to be restored again next day, and conclude sadly that it was but too true a prophecy and emblem of all worldly success. But your moralizing is broken short off by a rattle of feet and the pouring forth of the whole swarm, — the boys dancing and shouting, — the mere effervescence of the fixed air of youth and animal spirits uncorked, — the sedater girls in confidential twos and threes decanting secrets out of the mouth of one cape-bonnet into that of another. Times have changed since the jackets and trousers used to draw up on one side of the road, and the petticoats on the other, to salute with bow and curtsy the

white neckcloth of the parson or the squire, if it chanced to pass during intermission.

Now this little building, and others like it, were an original kind of fortification invented by the founders of New England. They are the martello-towers that protect our coast. This was the great discovery of our Puritan forefathers. They were the first lawgivers who saw clearly and enforced practically the simple moral and political truth, that knowledge was not an alms to be dependent on the chance charity of private men or the precarious pittance of a trust-fund, but a sacred debt which the Commonwealth owed to every one of her children. The opening of the first grammar-school was the opening of the first trench against monopoly in church and state; the first row of trammels and pot-hooks which the little Shearjashubs and Elkanahs blotted and blubbered across their copy-books, was the preamble to the Declaration of Independence. The men who gave every man the chance to become a landholder, who made the transfer of land easy, and put knowledge within the reach of all, have been called narrow-minded, because they were intolerant. But intolerant of what? Of what they believed to be dangerous nonsense, which, if left free, would destroy the last hope of civil and religious freedom. They had not come here that every man might do that which

seemed good in his own eyes, but in the sight of God. Toleration, moreover, is something which is won, not granted. It is the equilibrium of neutralized forces. The Puritans had no notion of tolerating mischief. They looked upon their little commonwealth as upon their own private estate and homestead, as they had a right to do, and would no more allow the Devil's religion of unreason to be preached therein, than we should permit a prize-fight in our gardens. They were narrow; in other words they had an edge to them, as men that serve in great emergencies must; for a Gordian knot is settled sooner with a sword than a beetle.

The founders of New England are commonly represented in the after-dinner oratory of their descendants as men "before their time," as it is called; in other words, deliberately prescient of events resulting from new relations of circumstances, or even from circumstances new in themselves, and therefore altogether alien from their own experience. Of course, such a class of men is to be reckoned among those non-existent human varieties so gravely catalogued by the ancient naturalists. If a man could shape his action with reference to what should happen a century after his death, surely it might be asked of him to call in the help of that easier foreknowledge which reaches from one day to the next, — a power of prophecy whereof we

have no example. I do not object to a wholesome pride of ancestry, though a little mythical, if it be accompanied with the feeling that *noblesse oblige*, and do not result merely in a placid self-satisfaction with our own mediocrity, as if greatness, like righteousness, could be imputed. We can pardon it even in conquered races, like the Welsh and Irish, who make up to themselves for present degradation by imaginary empires in the past whose boundaries they can extend at will, carrying the bloodless conquests of fancy over regions laid down upon no map, and concerning which authentic history is enviously dumb. Those long bead-rolls of Keltic kings cannot tyrannize over us, and we can be patient so long as our own crowns are uncracked by the shillalah sceptres of their actual representatives. In our own case, it would not be amiss, perhaps, if we took warning by the example of Teague and Taffy. At least, I think it would be wise in our orators not to put forward so prominently the claim of the Yankee to universal dominion, and his intention to enter upon it forthwith. If we do our duties as honestly and as much in the fear of God as our forefathers did, we need not trouble ourselves much about other titles to empire. The broad foreheads and long heads will win the day at last in spite of all heraldry, and it will be enough if we feel as keenly as our Puritan founders did

that those organs of empire may be broadened and lengthened by culture.[1] That our self-complacency should not increase the complacency of outsiders is not to be wondered at. As *we* sometimes take credit to ourselves (since all commendation of our ancestry is indirect self-flattery) for what the Puritan fathers never were, so there are others who, to gratify a spite against their descendants, blame them for not having been what they could not be; namely, before their time in such matters as slavery, witchcraft, and the like. The view, whether of friend or foe, is equally unhistorical, nay, without the faintest notion of all that makes history worth having as a teacher. That our grandfathers shared in the prejudices of their day is all that makes them human to us; and that nevertheless they could act bravely and wisely on occasion makes them only the more venerable. If certain barbarisms and superstitions disappeared earlier in New England than elsewhere, not by the decision of exceptionally enlightened or humane judges, but by force of public opinion, that is the fact that is interesting and instructive for us. I never thought it an abatement of Hawthorne's genius that he came lineally from one

[1] It is curious, that, when Cromwell proposed to transfer a colony from New England to Ireland, one of the conditions insisted on in Massachusetts was that a college should be established.

who sat in judgment on the witches in 1692; it was interesting rather to trace something hereditary in the sombre character of his imagination, continually vexing itself to account for the origin of evil, and baffled for want of that simple solution in a personal Devil.

But I have no desire to discuss the merits or demerits of the Puritans, having long ago learned the wisdom of saving my sympathy for more modern objects than Hecuba. My object is to direct the attention of my readers to a collection of documents where they may see those worthies as they were in their daily living and thinking. The collections of our various historical and antiquarian societies can hardly be said to be *published* in the strict sense of the word, and few consequently are aware how much they contain of interest for the general reader no less than the special student. The several volumes of "Winthrop Papers," in especial, are a mine of entertainment. Here we have the Puritans painted by themselves, and, while we arrive at a truer notion of the characters of some among them, and may accordingly sacrifice to that dreadful superstition of being usefully employed which makes so many bores and bored, we can also furtively enjoy the oddities of thought and speech, the humors of the time, which our local historians are too apt to despise as inconsidered trifles. For myself I confess myself heretic to

the established theory of the gravity of history, and am not displeased with an opportunity to smile behind my hand at any ludicrous interruption of that sometimes wearisome ceremonial. I am not sure that I would not sooner give up Raleigh spreading his cloak to keep the royal Dian's feet from the mud, than that awful judgment upon the courtier whose Atlantean thighs leaked away in bran through the rent in his trunk-hose. The painful fact that Fisher had his head cut off is somewhat mitigated to me by the circumstance that the Pope should have sent him, of all things in the world, a cardinal's hat after that incapacitation. Theology herself becomes less unamiable to me when I find the Supreme Pontiff writing to the Council of Trent that " they should begin with original sin, *maintaining yet a due respect for the Emperor*." That infallibility should thus curtsy to decorum shall make me think better of it while I live. I shall accordingly endeavor to give my readers what amusement I can, leaving it to themselves to extract solid improvement from the volumes before us, which include a part of the correspondence of three generations of Winthrops.

Let me premise that there are two men above all others for whom our respect is heightened by these letters, — the elder John Winthrop and Roger Williams. Winthrop appears throughout as a truly magnanimous and noble man in

an unobtrusive way, — a kind of greatness that makes less noise in the world, but is on the whole more solidly satisfying than most others, — a man who has been dipped in the river of God (a surer baptism than Styx or dragon's blood) till his character is of perfect proof, and who appears plainly as the very soul and life of the young Colony. Very reverend and godly he truly was, and a respect not merely ceremonious, but personal, a respect that savors of love, shows itself in the letters addressed to him. Charity and tolerance flow so naturally from the pen of Williams that it is plain they were in his heart. He does not show himself a very strong or very wise man, but a thoroughly gentle and good one. His affection for the two Winthrops is evidently of the warmest. We suspect that he lived to see that there was more reason in the drum-head religious discipline which made him, against his will, the founder of a commonwealth, than he may have thought at first. But for the fanaticism (as it is the fashion to call the sagacious straitness) of the abler men who knew how to root the English stock firmly in this new soil on either side of him, his little plantation could never have existed, and he himself would have been remembered only, if at all, as one of the jarring atoms in a chaos of otherwise-mindedness.

Two other men, Emanuel Downing and Hugh Peter, leave a positively unpleasant savor

in the nostrils. Each is selfish in his own way, — Downing with the shrewdness of an attorney, Peter with that clerical unction which in a vulgar nature so easily degenerates into greasiness. Neither of them was the man for a forlorn hope, and both returned to England when the civil war opened prospect of preferment there. Both, we suspect, were inclined to value their Puritanism for its rewards in this world rather than the next. Downing's son, Sir George, was basely prosperous, making the good cause pay him so long as it was solvent, and then selling out in season to betray his old commander, Colonel Okey, to the shambles at Charing Cross. Peter became a colonel in the Parliament's army, and under the Protectorate one of Cromwell's chaplains. On his trial, after the Restoration, he made a poor figure, in striking contrast to some of the brave men who suffered with him. At his execution a shocking brutality was shown. "When Mr. Cook was cut down and brought to be quartered, one they called Colonel Turner calling to the Sheriff's men to bring Mr. Peters near, that he might see it; and by and by the Hangman came to him all besmeared in blood, and rubbing his bloody hands together, he tauntingly asked, *Come, how do you like this, Mr. Peters? How do you like this work?*"[1]

[1] *State Trials*, ii. 409. One would not reckon too closely with a man on trial for his life, but there is something pitiful

This Colonel Turner can hardly have been other than the one who four years later came to the hangman's hands for robbery; and whose behavior, both in the dock and at the gallows, makes his trial one of the most entertaining as a display of character. Peter would seem to have been one of those men gifted with what is sometimes called eloquence; that is, the faculty of stating things powerfully from momentary feeling, and not from that conviction of the higher reason which alone can give force and permanence to words. His letters show him subject, like others of like temperament, to fits of "hypochondriacal melancholy," and the only witness he called on his trial was to prove that he was confined to his lodgings by such an attack on the day of the king's beheading. He seems to have been subject to this malady at convenience, as some women to hysterics. Honest John Endicott plainly had small confidence in him, and did not think him the right man to represent the Colony in England. There is a droll resolve in the Massachusetts records by which he is "desired to write to Holland for 500*l.* worth of *peter*, & 40*l.* worth of match." It is with a match that we find him burning his fingers in the present correspondence.

in Peter's representing himself as coming back to England "out of the West Indias," in order to evade any complicity with suspected New England.

Peter seems to have entangled himself somehow with a Mrs. Deliverance Sheffield, whether maid or widow nowhere appears, but presumably the latter. The following statement of his position is amusing enough: "I have sent Mrs. D. Sh. letter, which puts mee to new troubles, for though shee takes liberty upon my Cossen Downing's speeches, yet (Good Sir) let mee not be a foole in Israel. I had many good answers to yesterday's worke [a Fast] and amongst the rest her letter; which (if her owne) doth argue more wisedome than I thought shee had. You have often sayd I could not leave her; what to doe is very considerable. Could I with comfort & credit desist, this seemes best: could I goe on & content myselfe, that were good. . . . For though I now seeme free agayne, yet the depth I know not. Had shee come over with me, I thinke I had bin quieter. This shee may know, that I have sought God earnestly, that the nexte weeke I shall bee riper: — I doubt shee gaynes most by such writings: & shee deserves most where shee is further of. If you shall amongst you advise mee to write to hir, I shall forthwith; our towne lookes upon mee contracted & so I have sayd myselfe; what wonder the charge [change?] would make, I know not." Again: "Still pardon my offensive boldnes: I know not well whither Mrs. Sh. have set mee at liberty or not: my conclusion is,

that if you find I cannot make an honorable retreat, then I shall desire to advance σὺν Θεῷ. Of you I now expect your last advise, viz: whither I must goe on or of, *saluo evangelij honore:* if shee bee in good earnest to leave all agitations this way, then I stand still & wayt God's mind concerning mee. . . . If I had much mony I would part with it to her [be?] free, till wee heare what England doth, supposing I may bee called to some imployment that will not suit a marryed estate" (here another mode of escape presents itself, and he goes on): "for indeed (Sir) some must looke out & I have very strong thoughts to speake with the Duitch Governor & lay some way there for a supply &c." At the end of the letter, an objection to the lady herself occurs to him: "Once more for Mrs. Sh: I had from Mr. Hibbins & others, her fellowpassengers, sad discouragements where they saw her in her trim. I would not come of with dishonor, nor come on with griefe, or ominous hesitations." On all this shilly-shally we have a shrewd comment in a letter of Endicott: "I cannot but acquaint you with my thoughts concerning Mr. Peter since hee receaued a letter from Mrs. Sheffield, which was yesterday in the eveninge after the Fast, shee seeming in her letter to abate of her affeccions towards him & dislikinge to come to Salem vppon such termes as he had written. I finde now that hee begins

to play her parte, & if I mistake not, you will see him as greatly in loue with her (if shee will but hold of a little) as euer shee was with him; but he conceales it what he can as yett. The begininge of the next weeke you will heare further from him." The widow was evidently more than a match for poor Peter.

It should appear that a part of his trouble arose from his having coquetted also with a certain Mrs. Ruth, about whom he was "dealt with by Mrs. Amee, Mr. Phillips & 2 more of the Church, our Elder being one. When Mr. Phillips with much violence & sharpnes charged mee home . . . that I should hinder the mayd of a match at London, which was not so, could not thinke of any kindnes I euer did her, though shee haue had above 300*li.* through my fingers, so as if God uphold me not after an especiall manner, it will sinke me surely . . . hee told me he would not stop my intended marriage, but assured mee it would not bee good . . . all which makes mee reflect upon my rash proceedings with Mrs. Sh." Panurge's doubts and difficulties about matrimony were not more entertainingly contradictory. Of course, Peter ends by marrying the widow, and presently we have a comment on "her trim." In January, 1639, he writes to Winthrop: "My wife is very thankfull for her apples, & *desires much the new fashioned shooes*." Eight years later we find him

writing from England, where he had been two years: "I am coming over if I must; my wife comes of necessity to New England, having run her selfe out of breath here"; and then in the postscript, "bee sure you never let my wife come away from thence without my leave, & then you love mee." But life is never pure comedy, and the end in this case is tragical. Roger Williams, after his return from England in 1654, writes to John Winthrop, Jr.: "Your brother flourisheth in good esteeme & is eminent for maintaining the Freedome of the Conscience as to matters of Beliefe, Religion, & Worship. Your Father Peters preacheth the same Doctrine though not so zealously as some years since, yet cries out against New English Rigidities & Persecutions, their civil injuries & wrongs to himselfe, & their unchristian dealing with him in excommunicating his distracted wife. All this he tould me in his lodgings at Whitehall, those lodgings which I was tould were Canterburies [the Archbishop], but he himselfe tould me that that Library wherein we were together was Canterburies & given him by the Parliament. His wife lives from him, not wholy but much distracted. He tells me he had but 200 a yeare & he allowed her 4 score per annum of it. Surely, Sir, the most holy Lord is most wise in all the trialls he exerciseth his people with. He tould me that his afflic-

tion from his wife stird him up to Action abroad, & when successe tempted him to Pride, the Bitternes in his bozome-comforts was a Cooler & a Bridle to him." Truly the whirligig of time brings about strange revenges. Peter had been driven from England by the persecutions of Laud; a few years later he "stood armed on the scaffold" when that prelate was beheaded, and now we find him installed in the archiepiscopal lodgings. Dr. Palfrey, it appears to me, gives altogether too favorable an opinion both of Peter's character and abilities. I conceive him to have been a vain and selfish man. He may have had the bravery of passionate impulse, but he wanted that steady courage of character which has such a beautiful constancy in Winthrop. He always professed a longing to come back to New England, but it was only a way he had of talking. That he never meant to come is plain from these letters. Nay, when things looked prosperous in England, he writes to the younger Winthrop: "My counsell is you should come hither with your family for certaynly you will bee capable of a comfortable living in this free Commonwealth. I doo seriously advise it. . . . G. Downing is worth 500*l.* per annum but 4*l.* per diem — your brother Stephen worth 2000*l.* & a maior. I pray come." But when he is snugly ensconced in Whitehall, and may be presumed to have some influence

with the prevailing powers, his zeal cools. "I wish you & all friends to stay there & rather looke to the West Indyes if they remoue, for many are here to seeke when they come ouer." To me Peter's highest promotion seems to have been that he walked with John Milton at the Protector's funeral. He was, I suspect, one of those men, to borrow a charitable phrase of Roger Williams, who "feared God in the main," that is, whenever it was not personally inconvenient. William Coddington saw him in his glory in 1651: "Soe wee toucke the tyme to goe to viset Mr. Petters at his chamber. I was mery with him & called him the Arch. Bp.: of Canterberye, in regard to his adtendance by ministers & gentlemen, & it passed very well." Considering certain charges against Peter brought (though he is said, when under sentence of death, to have denied the truth of them), Coddington's statement that he liked to have "gentlewomen waite of him" in his lodgings has not a pleasant look. One last report of him we get (September, 1659) in a letter of John Davenport, — "that Mr. Hugh Peters is distracted & under sore horrors of conscience, crying out of himselfe as damned & confessing haynous actings."

Occasionally these letters give us interesting glimpses of persons and things in England. In the letter of Williams just cited, there is a lesson for all parties raised to power by exceptional

causes. "Surely, Sir, youre Father & all the people of God in England . . . are now in the sadle & at the helme, so high that *non datus descensus nisi cadendo :* Some cheere up their spirits with the impossibilitie of another fall or turne, so doth Major G. Harrison . . . a very gallant most deserving heavenly man, but most high-flowne for the Kingdom of the Saints & the 5th Monarchie now risen & their sun never to set againe &c. Others, as, to my knowledge, the Protector . . . are not so full of that faith of miracles, but still imagine changes & persecutions & the very slaughter of the witnesses before that glorious morning so much desired of a worldly Kingdome, if ever such a Kingdome (as literally it is by so many expounded) be to arise in this present world & dispensation." Poor General Harrison lived to be one of the witnesses so slaughtered. The practical good sense of Cromwell is worth noting, the English understanding struggling against Judaic trammels. Williams gives us another peep through the keyhole of the past: "It pleased the Lord to call me for some time & with some persons to practice the Hebrew, the Greeke, Latine, French & Dutch. The secretarie of the Councell (Mr. Milton) for my Dutch I read him, read me many more languages. Grammar rules begin to be esteemed a Tyrannie. I taught 2 young Gentlemen, a Parliament man's sons, as

we teach our children English, by words, phrazes, & constant talke, &c." It is plain that Milton had talked over with Williams the theory put forth in his tract on Education (it was Montaigne's also), and made a convert of him. We could wish that the good Baptist had gone a little more into particulars. But which of us knows among the men he meets whom time will dignify by curtailing him of the "Mr.," and reducing him to a bare patronymic, as being a kind by himself? We have a glance or two at Oliver, who is always interesting. "The late renowned Oliver confest to me in close discourse about the Protestants affaires &c. that he yet feard great persecutions to the protestants from the Romanists before the downfall of the Papacie," writes Williams in 1660. This "close discourse" must have been six years before, when Williams was in England. Within a year after, Oliver interfered to some purpose in behalf of the Protestants of Piedmont, and Mr. Milton wrote his famous sonnet. Of the war with Spain, Williams reports from his letters out of England in 1656: "This diversion against the Spaniard hath turnd the face & thoughts of many English, so that the saying now is, Crowne the Protector with gould,[1] though the sullen yet cry, Crowne him with thornes."

[1] Waller put this into verse: —

"Let the rich ore forthwith be melted down
And the state fixed by making him a crown."

Again in 1654: "I know the Protector had strong thoughts of Hispaniola & Cuba. Mr. Cotton's interpreting of Euphrates to be the West Indies, the supply of gold (to take off taxes), & the provision of a warmer *diverticulum & receptaculum* then N. England is, will make a footing into those parts very precious, & if it shall please God to vouchsafe successe to this fleete, I looke to hear of an invitation at least to these parts for removall from his Highnes who lookes on N. E. only with an eye of pitie, as poore, cold & useless." The mixture of Euphrates and taxes, of the transcendental and practical, prophecy taking precedence of thrift, is characteristic, and recalls Cromwell's famous rule, of fearing God *and* keeping your powder dry. In one of the Protector's speeches,[1] he insists much on his wish to retire to a private life. There is a curious confirmation of his sincerity in a letter of William Hooke, then belonging to his household, dated the 13th of April, 1657. The question of the kingly title was then under debate, and Hooke's account of the matter helps to a clearer understanding of the reasons for Cromwell's refusing the title: "The protector is urged *utrinque* & (I am ready to think) willing enough to betake himself to a private life, if it might be. He is a godly man, much in prayer & good discourses, delighting in good men & good minis-

[1] The *third* in Carlyle, 1654.

ters, self-denying & ready to promote any good work for Christ." [1] On the 5th of February, $165\frac{4}{5}$, Captain John Mason, of Pequot memory, writes "a word or twoe of newes as it comes from Mr. Eaton, viz: that the Parliament sate in September last; they chose their old Speaker & Clarke. The Protectour told them they were a free Parliament, & soe left them that day. They, considering where the legislative power resided, concluded to vote it on the morrow, & to take charge of the militia. The Protectour hereing of it, sent for some numbers of horse, went to the Parliament House, nayld up the doores, sent for them to the Painted Chamber, told them they should attend the lawes established, & that he would wallow in his blood before he would part with what was conferd upon him, tendering them an oath: 140 engaged." Now it is curious that Mr. Eaton himself, from whom Mason got his news, wrote, only two days before, an account, differing, in some particulars, and especially in tone, from Mason's. Of the speech he says, that it "gave such satisfaction that about 200 have since ingaged to owne the present Government." Yet Carlyle gives the same number of signers (140) as Mason, and there is a sentence in Cromwell's speech, as reported by Carlyle, of precisely the same purport as that quoted by Mason. To me, that "wallow

[1] *Collections Mass. Hist. Soc.*, Third Series, vol. i. p. 182.

in my blood" has rather more of the Cromwellian ring in it, more of the quality of spontaneous speech, than the "rolled into my grave and buried with infamy" of the official reporter. John Haynes (24th July, 1653) reports "newes from England of astonishing nature," concerning the dissolution of the Rump. We quote his story both as a contemporaneous version of the event, and as containing some particulars that explain the causes that led to it. It differs, in some respects, from Carlyle, and is hardly less vivid as a picture: "The Parliament of England & Councell of State are both dissolved, by whom & the manner this: The Lord Cromwell, Generall, went to the house & asked the Speaker & Bradshaw by what power they sate ther. They answered by the same power that he woare his sword. Hee replied they should know they did not, & said they should sitt noe longer, demanding an account of the vast sommes of money they had received of the Commons. They said the matter was of great consequence & they would give him accompt in tenn dayes. He said, Noe, they had sate too long already (& might now take their ease), for ther inriching themselves & impoverishing the Commons, & then seazed upon all the Records. Immediatly Lambert, Livetenant Generall, & Hareson Maior Generall (for they two were with him), tooke the Speaker Lenthall by the hands, lift him out of

the Chaire, & ledd him out of the house, & commanded the rest to depart, which fortwith was obeied, & the Generall took the keyes & locked the doore." He then goes on to give the reasons assigned by different persons for the act. Some said that the General "scented their purpose" to declare themselves perpetual, and to get rid of him by ordering him to Scotland. "Others say this, that the cries of the oppressed preveiled much with him . . . & hastned the declaracion of that ould principle, *Salus populi suprema lex* &c." The General, in the heat of his wrath, himself snatching the keys and locking the door, has a look of being drawn from the life. Cromwell, in a letter to General Fortescue (November, 1655), speaks sharply of the disorders and debauchedness, profaneness and wickedness, commonly practised amongst the army sent out to the West Indies. Major Mason gives us a specimen: "It is heere reported that some of the soldiers belonging to the ffleet at Boston, ffell upon the watch: after some bickering they comanded them to goe before the Governour; they retorted that they were Cromwell's boyes." Have we not, in these days, heard of "Sherman's boys"?

Belonging properly to the "Winthrop Papers," but printed in an earlier volume (Third Series, vol. i. pp. 185–198), is a letter of John Maidstone, which contains the best summary

of the civil war that I ever read. Indeed, it gives a clearer insight into its causes, and a better view of the vicissitudes of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, than any one of the more elaborate histories. There is a singular equity and absence of party passion in it which gives us faith in the author's judgment. He was Oliver's Steward of the Household, and his portrait of him, as that of an eminently fair-minded man who knew him well, is of great value. Carlyle has not copied it, and, as many of my readers may never have seen it, I reproduce it here: "Before I pass further, pardon me in troubling you with the character of his person, which, by reason of my nearness to him, I had opportunity well to observe. His body was well compact and strong; his stature under six feet (I believe about two inches); his head so shaped as you might see it a store-house and shop both, of a vast treasury of natural parts. His temper exceeding fiery, as I have known, but the flame of it kept down for the most part or soon allayed with those moral endowments he had. He was naturally compassionate towards objects in distress, even to an effeminate measure; though God had made him a heart wherein was left little room for any fear but what was due to himself, of which there was a large proportion, yet did he exceed in tenderness toward sufferers. A larger soul, I think, hath seldom

dwelt in a house of clay than his was. I do believe, if his story were impartially transmitted, and the unprejudiced world well possessed with it, she would add him to her nine worthies and make that number a *decemviri*. He lived and died in comfortable communion with God, as judicious persons near him well observed. He was that Mordecai that sought the welfare of his people and spake peace to his seed. Yet were his temptations such, as it appeared frequently that he that hath grace enough for many men may have too little for himself, the treasure he had being but in an earthen vessel and that equally defiled with original sin as any other man's nature is." There are phrases here that may be matched with the choicest in the life of Agricola; and, indeed, the whole letter, superior to Tacitus in judicial fairness of tone, goes abreast of his best writing in condensation, nay, surpasses it in this, that, while in Tacitus the intensity is of temper, here it is the clear residuum left by the ferment and settling of thought. Just before, speaking of the dissolution of Oliver's last Parliament, Maidstone says: "That was the last which sat during his life, he being compelled to wrestle with the difficulties of his place so well as he could without parliamentary assistance, and in it met with so great a burthen as (I doubt not to say) it drank up his spirits, of which his natural constitution

yielded a vast stock, and brought him to his grave, his interment being the seed-time of his glory and England's calamity." Hooke, in a letter of April 16, 1658, has a passage worth quoting: "The dissolucion of the last Parliament puts the supreme powers upon difficulties, though the trueth is the Nacion is so ill spirited that little good is to be expected from these Generall Assemblies. They [the supreme powers, to wit, Cromwell] have been much in Counsell since this disappointment, & God hath been sought by them in the effectuall sense of the need of help from heaven & of the extreme danger impendent on a miscarriage of their advises. But our expences are so vast that I know not how they can avoyde a recurrence to another Session & to make a further tryall. . . . The land is full of discontents, & the Cavaleerish party doth still expect a day & nourish hopes of a Revolucion. The Quakers do still proceed & are not yet come to their period. The Presbyterians do abound, I thinke, more than ever, & are very bold & confident because some of their masterpieces lye unanswered, particularly theire *Jus Divinum Regiminis Ecclesiastici* which I have sent to Mr. Davenporte. It hath been extant without answer these many years [only four, brother Hooke, if we may trust the title-page]. The Anabaptists abound likewise, & Mr. Tombes

hath pretended to have answered all the bookes extant against his opinion. I saw him presenting it to the Protectour of late. The Episcopall men ply the Common-Prayer booke with much more boldness then ever since these turnes of things, even in the open face of the City in severall places. I have spoken of it to the Protectour but as yet nothing is done in order to their being suppressed." It should teach us to distrust the apparent size of objects, which is a mere cheat of their nearness to us, that we are so often reminded of how small account things seem to one generation for which another was ready to die. A copy of the *Jus Divinum* held too close to the eyes could shut out the universe with its infinite chances and changes, its splendid indifference to our ephemeral fates. Cromwell, we should gather, had found out the secret of this historical perspective, to distinguish between the blaze of a burning tar-barrel and the final conflagration of all things. He had learned tolerance by the possession of power, — a proof of his capacity for rule. In 1652 Haynes writes: "Ther was a Catechise lately in print ther, that denied the divinity of Christ, yett ther was motions in the house by some, to have it lycenced by authority. Cromwell mainly oposed, & at last it was voted to bee burnt which causes much discontent of somme." Six years had made Cromwell wiser.

One more extract from a letter of Hooke's (30th March, 1659) is worth giving. After speaking of Oliver's death, he goes on to say: "Many prayers were put up solemnly for his life, & some, of great & good note, were too confident that he would not die. . . . I suppose himselfe had thoughts that he should have outlived this sickness till near his dissolution, perhaps a day or two before; which I collect partly by some words which he was said to speak . . . & partly from his delaying, almost to the last, to nominate his successor, to the wonderment of many who began sooner to despair of his life. . . . His eldest son succeedeth him, being chosen by the Council, the day following his father's death, whereof he had no expectation. I have heard him say he had thought to have lived as a country gentleman, & that his father had not employed him in such a way as to prepare him for such employment; which, he thought, he did designedly. I suppose his meaning was lest it should have been apprehended he had prepared & appointed him for such a place, the burthen whereof I have several times heard him complaining under since his coming to the Government, the weighty occasions whereof with continuall oppressing cares had drunk up his father's spirits, in whose body very little blood was found when he was opened: the greatest defect visible was in his heart, which

was flaccid & shrunk together. Yet he was one that could bear much without complaining, as one of a strong constitution of brain (as appeared when he was dissected) & likewise of body. His son seemeth to be of another frame, soft & tender, & penetrable with easier cares by much, yet he is of a sweete countenance, vivacious & candid, as is the whole frame of his spirit, only naturally inclined to choler. His reception of multitudes of addresses from towns, cities, & counties doth declare, among several other indiciums, more of ability in him than could, ordinarily, have been expected from him. He spake also with general acceptation & applause when he made his speech before the Parliament, even far beyond the Lord Fynes.[1] . . . If this Assembly miss it, we are like to be in an ill condition. The old ways & customs of England, as to worshipe, are in the hearts of the most, who long to see the days again which once they saw. . . . The hearts of very many are for the house of the Stewarts, & there is a speech as if they would attempt to call the late King's judges into question. . . .The city, I hear is full of Cavaliers." Poor Richard appears to have inherited little of his father but the inclination to choler. That he could speak far beyond the Lord Fynes seems to have been not much to the purpose. Rhetoric was not precisely the

[1] This speech may be found in the Annual Register of 1762.

medicine for such a case as he had to deal with. Such were the glimpses which the New England had of the Old. Ishmael must ere long learn to shift for himself.

The temperance question agitated the fathers very much as it still does the children. We have never seen the anti-prohibition argument stated more cogently than in a letter of Thomas Shepard, minister of Cambridge, to Winthrop, in 1639: "This also I doe humbly intreat, that there may be no sin made of *drinking in any case one to another*, for I am confident he that stands here will fall & be beat from his grounds by his own arguments; as also that the consequences will be very sad, and the thing provoking to God & man to make more sins than (as yet is seene) God himself hath made." A principle as wise now as it was then. Our ancestors were also harassed as much as we by the difficulties of domestic service. In a country where land might be had for the asking, it was not easy to keep hold of servants brought over from England. Emanuel Downing, always the hard, practical man, would find a remedy in negro slavery. "A warr with the Narraganset," he writes to Winthrop in 1645, "is verie considerable to this plantation, ffor I doubt whither it be not synne in us, having power in our hands, to suffer them to maynteyne the worship of the devill which their pawwawes often doe; 2lie, If upon

a just warre the Lord should deliver them into our hands, wee might easily have men, woemen, & children enough to exchange for Moores, which wilbe more gaynefull pilladge for us than wee conceive, for I doe not see how wee can thrive untill wee gett into a stock of slaves sufficient to doe all our buisenes, for our childrens children will hardly see this great Continent filled with people, soe that our servants will still desire freedome to plant for them selves, & not stay but for verie great wages. And I suppose you know verie well how wee shall maynteyne 20 Moores cheaper than one Englishe servant." The doubt whether it be not sin in us longer to tolerate their devil-worship, considering how much need we have of them as merchandise, is delicious. The way in which Hugh Peter grades the sharp descent from the apostolic to the practical with an *et cetera*, in the following extract, has the same charm: "Sir, Mr. Endecot & myself salute you in the Lord Jesus &c. Wee have heard of a dividence of women & children in the bay & would bee glad of a share viz: a young woman or girle & a boy if you thinke good." Peter seems to have got what he asked for, and to have been worse off than before; for we find him writing two years later: "My wife desires my daughter to send to Hanna that was her mayd, now at Charltowne, to know if shee would dwell

with us, for truly wee are so destitute (having now but an Indian) that we know not what to doe." Let any housewife of our day, who does not find the Keltic element in domestic life so refreshing as to Mr. Arnold in literature, imagine a household with one wild Pequot woman, communicated with by signs, for its maid of all work, and take courage. Those were serious times indeed, when your cook might give warning by taking your scalp, or *chignon*, as the case might be, and making off with it into the woods. The fewness and dearness of servants made it necessary to call in temporary assistance for extraordinary occasions, and hence arose the common use of the word *help*. As the great majority kept no servants at all, and yet were liable to need them for work to which the family did not suffice, as, for instance, in harvest, the use of the word was naturally extended to all kinds of service. That it did not have its origin in any false shame at the condition itself, induced by democratic habits, is plain from the fact that it came into use while the word *servant* had a much wider application than now, and certainly implied no social stigma. Downing and Hooke, each at different times, one of them so late as 1667, wished to place a son as "servant" with one of the Winthrops. Roger Williams writes of his daughter, that "she desires to spend some time in service & liked much Mrs.

Brenton, who wanted." This was, no doubt, in order to be well drilled in housekeeping, an example which might be followed still to advantage. John Tinker, himself the "servant" or steward of the second Winthrop, makes use of *help* in both the senses we have mentioned, and shows the transition of the word from its restricted to its more general application. "We have fallen a pretty deal of timber & drawn some by Goodman Rogers's team, but unless your worship have a good team of your own & a man to go with them, I shall be much distracted for *help* . . . & when our business is most in haste we shall be most to seek." Again, writing at harvest, as appears both by the date and by an elaborate pun, — "I received the *sithes* you sent but in that there came not also yourself, it maketh me to *sigth*," — he says: "*Help* is scarce and hard to get, difficult to please, uncertain, &c. Means runneth out & wages on & I cannot make choice of my *help*."

It may be some consolation to know that the complaint of a decline in the quality of servants is no modern thing. Shakespeare makes Orlando say to Adam: —

> "O, good old man, how well in thee appears
> The constant service of the antique world,
> When service sweat for duty, not for meed!
> Thou art not of the fashion of these times,
> When none will sweat but for promotion."

When the faithful old servant is brought upon the stage, we may be sure he was getting rare. A century later, we have explicit testimony that things were as bad in this respect as they are now. Don Mánuel Gonzales, who travelled in England in 1730, says of London servants: "As to common menial servants, they have great wages, are well kept and cloathed, but are notwithstanding the plague of almost every house in town. They form themselves into societies or rather confederacies, contributing to the maintenance of each other when out of place, and if any of them cannot manage the family where they are entertained, as they please, immediately they give notice they will be gone. There is no speaking to them, they are above correction, and if a master should attempt it, he may expect to be handsomely drubbed by the creature he feeds and harbors, or perhaps an action brought against him for it. It is become a common saying, *If my servant ben't a thief, if he be but honest, I can bear with other things.* And indeed it is very rare in London to meet with an honest servant." [1] Southey writes to his daughter Edith, in 1824, "All the maids eloped because I had turned a man out of the kitchen at eleven o'clock on the preceding night." Nay, Hugh Rhodes, in his "Boke of Nurture"

[1] *Collection of Voyages*, etc., from the Library of the Earl of Oxford, vol. ii. p. 151.

(1577), speaks of servants "ofte fleeting," i. e. leaving one master for another.

One of the most curious things revealed to us in these volumes is the fact that John Winthrop, Jr., was seeking the philosopher's stone, that universal elixir which could transmute all things to its own substance. This is plain from the correspondence of Edward Howes. Howes goes to a certain doctor, professedly to consult him about the method of making a cement for earthen vessels, no doubt crucibles. His account of him is amusing, and reminds one of Ben Jonson's Subtle. This was one of the many quacks who gulled men during that twilight through which alchemy was passing into chemistry. "This Dr, for a Dr he is, brags that if he have but the hint or notice of any useful thing not yet invented, he will undertake to find it out, except some few which he hath vowed not to meddle with as *vitrum maliabile*, *perpet. motus*, *via proxima ad Indos & lapis philosi:* all, or anything else he will undertake, but for his private gain, to make a monopoly thereof & to sell the use or knowledge thereof at too high rates." This breed of pedlers in science is not yet extinct. The exceptions made by the Doctor show a becoming modesty. Again: "I have been 2 or 3 times with the Dr & can get but small satisfaction about your queries. . . . Yet I must confess he seemed very free to me,

only in the main he was mystical. This he said, that when the will of God is you shall know what you desire, it will come with such a light that it will make a harmony among all your authors, causing them sweetly to agree, & put you forever out of doubt & question." In another letter: "I cannot discover into *terram incognitam*, but I have had a ken of it showed unto me. The way to it is, for the most part, horrible & fearful, the dangers none worse, to them that are *destinati filii:* sometimes I am travelling that way. . . . I think I have spoken with some that have been there."

Howes writes very cautiously: "Dear friend, I desire with all my heart that I might write plainer to you, but in discovering the mystery, I may diminish its majesty & give occasion to the profane to abuse it, if it should fall into unworthy hands." By and by he begins to think his first doctor a humbug, but he finds a better. Howes was evidently a man of imaginative temper, fit to be captivated by the alchemistic theory of the unity of composition in Nature, which was so attractive to Goethe. Perhaps the great poet was himself led to it by his Rosicrucian studies when writing the first part of "Faust." Howes tells his friend that "there is all good to be found in unity, & all evil in duality & multiplicity. *Phoenix illa admiranda sola semper existit*, therefore while a man & she is two,

he shall never see her," — a truth of very wide application, and too often lost sight of or never seen at all. "The Arabian Philos. I writ to you of, he was styled among us Dr. Lyon, the best of all the Rosicrucians[1] that ever I met withal, far beyond Dr. Ewer: they that are of his strain are knowing men; they pretend [i. e. claim] to live in free light, they honor God & do good to the people among whom they live, & I concieve you are in the right that they had their learning from Arabia."

Howes is a very interesting person, a mystic of the purest kind, and that while learning to be an attorney with Emanuel Downing. How little that perfunctory person dreamed of what was going on under his nose, — as little as of the spiritual wonders that lay beyond the tip of it! Howes was a Swedenborgian before Swedenborg. Take this, for example: "But to our sympathetical business whereby we may communicate our minds one to another though the diameter of the earth interpose. *Diana non est centrum omnium.* I would have you so good a geometrician as to know your own centre. Did you ever yet measure your everlasting self, the length of your life, the breadth of your love, the depth of your wisdom & the height of your light? Let Truth be your centre, & you may do it, otherways not. I could wish you would

[1] Howes writes the word symbolically.

now begin to leave off being altogether an outward man; this is but *casa Regentis;* the Ruler can draw you straight lines from your centre to the confines of an infinite circumference, by which you may pass from any part of the circumference to another without obstacle of earth or secation of lines, if you observe & keep but one & the true & only centre, to pass by it, from it, & to it. Methinks I now see you *intus et extra* & talk to you, but you mind me not because you are from home, you are not within, you look as if you were careless of yourself; your hand & your voice differ; 't is my friend's hand, I know it well; but the voice is your enemy's. O, my friend, if you love me, get you home, get you in! You have a friend as well as an enemy. Know them by their voices. The one is still driving or enticing you out; the other would have you stay within. Be within and keep within, & all that are within & keep within shall you seek now & communicate with to the full, & shall not need to strain your outward senses to see & hear that which is like themselves uncertain & too-too often false, but, abiding forever within, in the centre of Truth, from thence you may behold & understand the innumerable divers emanations within the circumference, & still within; for without are falsities, lies, untruths, dogs &c." Howes was tolerant also, not from want of faith, but from depth of it. "The

relation of your fight with the Indians I have read in print, but of the fight among yourselves, *bellum linguarum* the strife of tongues, I have heard much, but little to the purpose. I wonder your people, that pretend to know so much, doe not know that love is the fulfilling of the law, & that against love there is no law." Howes forgot that what might cause only a ripple in London might overwhelm the tiny Colony in Boston. Two years later, he writes more philosophically, and perhaps with a gentle irony, concerning " two monstrous births & a general earthquake." He hints that the people of the Bay might perhaps as well take these signs to themselves as lay them at the door of Mrs. Hutchinson and what not. " Where is there such another people then [as] in New England, that labors might & main to have Christ formed in them, yet would give or appoint him his shape & clothe him too? It cannot be denied that we have conceived many monstrous imaginations of Christ Jesus : the one imagination says, *Lo, here he is ;* the other says, *Lo, there he is ;* multiplicity of conceptions, but is there any one true shape of Him? And if one of many produce a shape, 't is not the shape of the Son of God, but an ugly horrid metamorphosis. Neither is it a living shape, but a dead one, yet a crow thinks her own bird the fairest, & most prefer their own wisdom before God's, Anti-

christ before Christ." Howes had certainly arrived at that "centre" of which he speaks and was before his time, as a man of speculation, never a man of action, may sometimes be. He was fitter for Plotinus's colony than Winthrop's. He never came to New England, yet there was always a leaven of his style of thinkers here.

Howes was the true adept, seeking what spiritual ore there might be among the dross of the hermetic philosophy. What he says sincerely and inwardly was the cant of those outward professors of the doctrine who were content to dwell in the material part of it forever. In Jonathan Brewster, we have a specimen of these Wagners. Is it not curious, that there should have been a *balneum Mariae* at New London two hundred years ago? that *la recherche de l'Absolu* should have been going on there in a log hut, under constant fear that the Indians would put out, not merely the flame of one little life, but, far worse, the fire of our furnace, and so rob the world of this divine secret, just on the point of revealing itself? Alas! poor Brewster's secret was one that many have striven after before and since, who did not call themselves alchemists, — the secret of getting gold without earning it, — a chase that brings some men to a four-in-hand on Shoddy Avenue, and some to the penitentiary, in both cases advertising its utter vanity. Brewster is a capital specimen of his class,

who are better than the average, because they *do* mix a little imagination with their sordidness, and who have also their representatives among us, in those who expect the Jennings and other ideal estates in England. If Hawthorne had but known of him! And yet how perfectly did his genius divine that ideal element in our early New England life, conceiving what must have been without asking proof of what actually was!

An extract or two will sufficiently exhibit Brewster in his lunes. Sending back some alchemistic book to Winthrop, he tells him that if his name be kept secret, "I will write as clear a light, as far as I dare to, in finding the first ingredience. . . . The first figure in Flamonell doth plainly resemble the first ingredience, what it is, & from whence it comes, & how gotten, as there you may plainly see set forth by 2 resemblances held in a man's hand; for the confections there named is a delusion, for they are but the operations of the work after some time set, as the scum of the Red Sea, which is the Virgin's Milk upon the top of the vessel, white. Red Sea is the sun & moon calcinated & brought & reduced into water mineral which in some time, & most of the whole time, is red. 2ndly, the fat of mercurial wind, that is the fat or quintessence of sun & moon, earth & water, drawn out from them both, & flies aloft & [is] bore

up by the operation of our mercury, that is our fire which is our air or wind." This is as satisfactory as Lepidus's account of the generation of the crocodile: "Your serpent of Egypt is bred now of your mud by the operation of your sun: so is your crocodile." After describing the three kinds of fire, that of the lamp, that of ashes, and that against Nature, which last "is the fire of fire, that is the secret fire drawn up, being the quintessence of the sun & moon, with the other mercurial water joined with & together, which is fire elemental," he tells us that "these fires are & doth contain the whole mystery of the work." The reader, perhaps, thinks that he has nothing to do but forthwith to turn all the lead he can lay his hands on into gold. But no: "If you had the first ingredience & the proportion of each, yet all were nothing if you had not the certain times & seasons of the planets & signs, when to give more or less of this fire, namely a hot & dry, a cold & moist fire which you must use in the mercurial water before it comes to black & after into white & then red, which is only done by these fires, which when you practise you will easily see & perceive, that you shall stand amazed, & admire at the great & admirable wisdom of God, that can produce such a wonderful, efficacious, powerful thing as this is to convert all metallic bodies to its own nature, which may be well called a

first essence. I say by such weak simple means of so little value & so little & easy labor & skill, that I may say with Artephus, 200 page, it is of a worke so easy & short, fitter for women & young children than sage & grave men. . . . I thank the Lord, I understand the matter perfectly in the said book, yet I could desire to have it again 12 months hence, for about that time I shall have occasion to peruse, when as I come to the second working which is most difficult, which will be some three or [4] months before the perfect white, & afterwards, as Artephus saith, I may burn my books, for he saith it is one regiment as well for the red as for the white. The Lord in mercy give me life to see the end of it!" — an exclamation I more than once made in the course of some of Brewster's periods.

Again, under pledge of profound secrecy, he sends Winthrop a manuscript, which he may communicate to the owner of the volume formerly lent, because "it gave me such light in the second work as I should not readily have found out by study, also & especially how to work the elixir fit for medicine & healing all maladies which is clean another way of working than we held formerly. Also a light given how to dissolve any hard substance into the elixir, which is also another work. And many other things which in Ribley [Ripley?] I could not

find out. More works of the same I would gladly see . . . for, Sir, so it is that any book of this subject, I can understand it, though never so darkly written, having both knowledge & experience of the world,[1] that now easily I may understand their envious carriages to hide it. . . . You may marvel why I should give any light to others in this thing before I have perfected my own. This know, that my work being true thus far by all their writings, it cannot fail . . . for if &c &c you cannot miss if you would, except you break your glass." He confesses he is mistaken as to the time required, which he now, as well as I can make out, reckons at about ten years. "I fear I shall not live to see it finished, in regard partly of the Indians, who, I fear, will raise wars, as also I have a conceit that God sees me not worthy of such a blessing, by reason of my manifold miscarriages." Therefore he "will shortly write all the whole work in few words plainly which may be done in 20 lines from the first to the last & seal it up in a little box & subscribe it to yourself . . . & will so write it that neither wife nor children shall know thereof." If Winthrop should succeed in bringing the work to perfection, Brewster begs him to remember his wife and children. "I mean if this my work should miscarry by wars of the Indians, for I

[1] "World" here should clearly be "work."

may not remove it till it be perfected, otherwise I should so unsettle the body by removing sun & moon out of their settled places, that there would then be no other afterworking." Once more he inculcates secrecy, and for a most comical reason: "For it is such a secret as is not fit for every one either for secrecy or for parts to use it, as God's secret for his glory, to do good therewith, or else they may do a great deal of hurt, spending & employing it to satisfy sinful lusts. Therefore, I intreat you, sir, spare to use my name, & let my letters I send either be safely kept or burned that I write about it, for indeed, sir, I am more than before sensible of the evil effects that will arise by the publishing of it. I should never be at quiet, neither at home nor abroad, for one or other that would be enquiring & seeking after knowledge thereof, that I should be tired out & forced to leave the place: nay, it would be blazed abroad into Europe." How much more comic is Nature than any comedy! *Mutato nomine de te.* Take heart, ambitious youth, the sun and moon will be no more disconcerted by any effort of yours than by the pots and pans of Jonathan Brewster. It is a curious proof of the duality so common (yet so often overlooked) in human character, that Brewster was all this while manager of the Plymouth trading-post, near what is now New London. The

only professors of the transmutation of metals who still impose on mankind are to be found in what is styled the critical department of literature. Their *materia prima*, or universal solvent, serves equally for the lead of one friend or the brass of another.

In a letter of Sir Kenelm Digby to J. Winthrop, Jr., we find some odd prescriptions. "For all sorts of agues, I have of late tried the following magnetical experiment with infallible success. Pare the patient's nails when the fit is coming on, & put the parings into a little bag of fine linen or sarsenet, & tie that about a live eel's neck in a tub of water. The eel will die & the patient will recover. And if a dog or hog eat that eel, they will also die."

> "The man recovered of the bite,
> The dog it was that died!"

"I have known one that cured all deliriums & frenzies whatsoever, & at once taking, with an elixir made of dew, nothing but dew purified & nipped up in a glass & digested 15 months till all of it was become a gray powder, not one drop of humidity remaining. This I know to be true, & that first it was as black as ink, then green, then gray, & at 22 months' end it was as white & lustrous as any oriental pearl. But it cured manias at 15 months' end." Poor Brewster would have been the better for a dose of it, as well as some in our day, who expect to

cure men of being men by act of Congress. In the same letter Digby boasts of having made known the properties of *quinquina*, and also of the sympathetic powder, with which latter he wrought a "famous cure" of pleasant James Howell, author of the "Letters." I do not recollect that Howell anywhere alludes to it. In the same letter, Digby speaks of the books he had sent to Harvard College, and promises to send more. In all Paris he cannot find a copy of Blaise Viginere "Des Chiffres." "I had it in my library in England, but at the plundering of my house I lost it with many other good books. I have *laid out* in all places for it." The words we have underscored would be called a Yankeeism now. The house was Gatehurst, a fine Elizabethan dwelling, still, or lately, standing. Digby made his peace with Cromwell, and professes his readiness to spend his blood for him. He kept well with both sides, and we are not surprised to find Hooke saying that he hears no good of him from any.

The early colonists found it needful to bring over a few trained soldiers, both as drillmasters and engineers. Underhill, Patrick, and Gardner had served in the Low Countries, probably also Mason. As Paris has been said to be not precisely the place for a deacon, so the camp of the Prince of Orange could hardly have been the

best training-school for Puritans in practice, however it may have been for masters of casuistic theology. The position of these rough warriors among a people like those of the first emigration must have been a droll one. That of Captain Underhill certainly was. In all our early history, there is no figure so comic. Full of the pedantry of his profession and fond of noble phrases, he is a kind of cross between Dugald Dalgetty and Ancient Pistol, with a slight relish of the *miles gloriosus*. Underhill had taken side with Mr. Wheelwright in his heretical opinions, and there is every reason why he should have maintained, with all the ardor of personal interest, the efficiency of a covenant of grace without reference to the works of the subject of it. Coming back from a visit to England in 1638, he "was questioned for some speeches uttered by him in the ship, viz: that they at Boston were zealous as the scribes and pharisees were and as Paul was before his conversion, which he denying, they were proved to his face by a sober woman whom he had seduced in the ship and drawn to his opinion; but she was afterwards better informed in the truth. Among other passages, he told her how he came by his assurance, saying that, having long lain under a spirit of bondage, and continued in a legal way near five years, he could get no assurance, till at length, as he was taking a pipe of the good creature tobacco, the

spirit fell home upon his heart, an absolute promise of free grace, with such assurance and joy, as he never doubted since of his good estate, neither should he, whatsoever sin he should fall into, — a good preparative for such motions as he familiarly used to make to some of that sex. . . . The next day he was called again and banished. The Lord's day after, he made a speech in the assembly, showing that as the Lord was pleased to convert Paul as he was persecuting &c, so he might manifest himself to him as he was making moderate use of the good creature called tobacco." A week later "he was privately dealt with upon suspicion of incontinency . . . but his excuse was that the woman was in great trouble of mind, and some temptations, and that he resorted to her to comfort her." He went to the Eastward, and, having run himself out there, thought it best to come back to Boston and reinstate himself by eating his leek. "He came in his worst clothes (being accustomed to take great pride in his bravery and neatness) without a band, in a foul linen cap pulled close to his eyes, and, standing upon a form, he did, with many deep sighs and abundance of tears, lay open his wicked course, his adultery, his hypocrisy &c. He spake well, save that his blubbering &c. interrupted him." We hope he was a sincere penitent, but men of his complexion are apt to be pleased with such a tragi-comedy of

self-abasement, if only they can be chief actors and conspicuous enough therein. In the correspondence before us Underhill appears in full turkey-cock proportions. Not having been advanced according to his own opinion of his merits, he writes to Governor Winthrop, with an oblique threat that must have amused him somewhat: "I profess, sir, till I know the cause, I shall not be satisfied, but I hope God will subdue me to his will; yet this I say that such handling of officers in foreign parts hath so far subverted some of them as to cause them turn public rebels against their state & kingdom, which God forbid should ever be found once so much as to appear in my breast." Why, then the world's mine oyster, which I with sword will open! Next we hear him on a point of military discipline at Salem. "It is this: how they have of their own appointment made them a captain, lieutenant & ensign, & after such a manner as was never heard of in any school of war, nor in no kingdom under heaven. . . . For my part, if there should not be a reformation in this disordered practice, I would not acknowledge such officers. If officers should be of no better esteem than for constables to place them, & martial discipline to proceed disorderly, I would rather lay down my command than to shame so noble a prince from whom we came." Again: "Whereas it is somewhat questionable

whether the three months I was absent, as well in the service of the country as of other particular persons, my request therefore is that this honored Court would be pleased to decide this controversy, myself alleging it to be the custom of Nations that, if a Commander be lent to another State, by that State to whom he is a servant, both his place & means is not detained from him, so long as he doth not refuse the call of his own State to which he is a servant, in case they shall call him home." Then bringing up again his "ancient suit" for a grant of land, he throws in a neat touch of piety: "& if the honored Court shall vouchsafe to make some addition, that which hath not been deserved, by the same power of God, may be in due season." In a postscript, he gives a fine philosophical reason for this desired addition which will go to the hearts of many in these days of high prices and wasteful taxation. "The time was when a little went far: then much was not known nor desired; the reason of the difference lieth only in the error of judgment, for Nature requires no more to uphold it now than when it was satisfied with less." The valiant Captain interprets the law of nations, as sovereign powers are wont to do, to suit his advantage in the special case. We find a parallel case in a letter of Bryan Rosseter to John Winthrop, Jr., pleading for a remission of taxes. "The lawes of nations exempt

allowed phisitians from personall services, & their estates from rates & assessments." In the Declaration of the town of Southampton on Long Island (1673), the dignity of constable is valued at a juster rate than Underhill was inclined to put upon it. The Dutch, it seems, demanded of them "to deliver up to them the badge of Civil & Military power; namely, the Constable's staffe & the Colonel's." Mayor Munroe of New Orleans did not more effectually magnify his office when he surrendered the city to General Butler.

Underhill's style is always of the finest. His spelling was under the purest covenant of grace. I must give a single specimen of it from a letter whose high moral tone is all the more diverting that it was written while he was under excommunication for the sin which he afterwards confessed. It is addressed to Winthrop and Dudley. "Honored in the Lord. Youer silenc onc more admirse me. I youse chrischan playnnes. I know you love it. Silenc can not reduce the hart of youer love^{s} brother: I would the rightchous would smite me, espeschali youer slfe & the honnored Depoti to whom I also dereckt this letter together with youer honnored slfe. Jesos Christ did wayt; & God his Father did dig and telfe bout the barren figtre before he would cast it of: I would to God you would tender my soule so as to youse playnnes with

me." (As if anything could be plainer than excommunication and banishment!) "I wrot to you both, but now [no] answer; & here I am dayli abused by malischous tongse: John Baker I here hath rot to the honnored depoti how as I was dronck & like to be cild, & both falc, upon okachon I delt with Wannerton for intrushon, & findding them resolutli bent to rout out all gud a mong us & advanc there superstischous waye, & by boystrous words indeferd to fritten men to acomplish his end, & he abusing me to my face, dru upon him with intent to corb his insolent and dasterdli sperrite, but now [no] danger of my life, although it might hafe bin just with God to hafe giffen me in the hanse of youer enemise & mine, for they hat the wayse of the Lord & them that profes them, & therfore layes trapes to cachte the pore into there deboyst corses, as ister daye on Pickeren their Chorch Warden caim up to us with intent to mak some of ourse dronc, as is sospeckted, but the Lord soferd him so to misdemen himslfe as he is likli to li by the hielse this too month .... My hombel request is that you will be charitabel of me. ... Let justies and merci be goyned. ... You may plese to soggest youer will to this barrer, you will find him tracktabel." The concluding phrase seems admirably chosen, when we consider the means of making people "tractable" which the magis-

trates of the Bay had in their hands, and were not slow to exercise, as Underhill himself had experienced.

I cannot deny myself the pleasure of giving one more specimen of the Captain's "grand-delinquent" style, as I once heard such fine writing called by a person who little dreamed what a hit he had made. So far as I have observed, our public defaulters, and others who have nothing to say for themselves, always rise in style as they sink in self-respect. He is speaking of one Scott, who had laid claim to certain lands, and had been called on to show his title. "If he break the comand of the Asembli & bring not in the counterfit portreture of the King imprest in yello waxe, anext to his false perpetuiti of 20 mile square, where by he did chet the Town of Brouckhaven, he is to induer the sentance of the Court of Asisies." Pistol would have been charmed with that splendid amplification of the Great Seal. As examples of Captain Underhill's adroitness in phonetic spelling, I offer *fafarabel* and *poseschonse*, and reluctantly leave him.

Another very entertaining fellow for those who are willing to work through a pretty thick husk of tiresomeness for a genuine kernel of humor underneath is Coddington. The elder Winthrop endured many trials, but I doubt if any were sharper than those which his son had

to undergo in the correspondence of this excellently tiresome man. *Tantae molis Romanam condere gentem!* The dulness of Coddington, always that of no ordinary man, became irritable and aggressive after being stung by the gadfly of Quakerism. Running counter to its proper nature, it made him morbidly uneasy. Already an Anabaptist, his brain does not seem to have been large enough to lodge two maggots at once with any comfort to himself. Fancy John Winthrop, Jr., with all the affairs of the Connecticut Colony on his back, expected to prescribe alike for the spiritual and bodily ailments of all the hypochondriacs in his government, and with Philip's war impending, — fancy him exposed also to perpetual trials like this: "G. F. [George Fox] hath sent thee a book of his by Jere: Bull, & two more now which thou mayest communicate to thy Council & officers. Also I remember before thy last being in England, I sent thee a book written by Francis Howgall against persecution, by Joseph Nicallson which book thou lovingly accepted and communicated to the Commissioners of the United Colonies (as I desired) also J. N. thou entertained with a loving respect which encouraged me" (fatal hospitality!) — "As a token of that ancient love that for this 42 years I have had for thee, I have sent thee three Manuscripts, one of 5 queries, other is of 15, about the love of Jesus,

&c. The 3d is why we cannot come to the worship which was not set up by Christ Jesus which I desire thee to communicate to the priests to answer in thy jurisdiction, the Massachusetts, New Plymouth, or elsewhere, & send their answer in writing to me. Also two printed papers to set up in thy house. It 's reported in Barbadoes that thy brother Sammuell shall be sent Governour to Antego." What a mere dust of sugar in the last sentence for such a portentous pill! In his next letter he has other writings of G. F., "not yet copied, which if thou desireth, when I hear from thee, I may convey them unto thee. Also sence G. Ffox departure William Edmondson is arrived at this Island, who having given out a paper to all in authority, which, my wife having copied, I have here inclosed presented thee therewith." Books and manuscripts were not all. Coddington was also glad to bestow on Winthrop any wandering tediousness in the flesh that came to hand. "I now understand of John Stubbs freedom to visit thee (with the said Jo: B.) he is a larned man, as witness the battle door[1] on 35 languages,"—a terrible man this, capable of inflicting himself on three dozen different kindreds of men. It will be observed that Coddington, with his "thou desireths," is not quite so well up in

[1] The title-page of which our learned Marsh has cited for the etymology of the word.

the grammar of his thee-and-thouing as my Lord Coke. Indeed, it is rather pleasant to see that in his alarm about "the enemy," in 1673, he backslides into the second person plural. If Winthrop ever looked over his father's correspondence, he would have read in a letter of Henry Jacie the following dreadful example of retribution: "The last news we heard was that the Bores in Bavaria slew about three hundred of the Swedish forces & took about 200 prisoners, of which they put out the eyes of some & cut out the tonges of others & so sent them to the King of Sweden, which caused him to lament bytterly for an hour. Then he sent an army & destroyed those Bores, about 200 or 300 of their towns. Thus we hear." Think of that, Master Coddington! Could the sinful heart of man always suppress the wish that a Gustavus might arise to do judgment on the Bores of Rhode Island? The unkindest part of it was that, on Coddington's own statement, Winthrop had never persecuted the Quakers, and had even endeavored to save Robinson and Stevenson in 1659.

Speaking of the execution of these two martyrs to the bee in their bonnets, John Davenport gives us a capital example of the way in which Divine "judgments" may be made to work both ways at the pleasure of the interpreter. As the crowd was going home from

the hanging, a drawbridge gave way, and some lives were lost. The Quakers, of course, made the most of this lesson to the *pontifices* in the bearing power of timber, claiming it as a proof of God's wrath against the persecutors. This was rather hard, since none of the magistrates perished, and the popular feeling was strongly in favor of the victims of their severity. But Davenport gallantly captures these Quaker guns, and turns them against the enemy himself. "Sir, the hurt that befell so many, by their own rashness, at the Draw Bridge in Boston, being on the day that the Quakers were executed, was not without God's special providence in judgment & wrath, I fear, against the Quakers & their abettors, who will be much hardened thereby." This is admirable, especially as his parenthesis about "their own rashness" assumes that the whole thing was owing to natural causes. The pity for the Quakers, too, implied in the "I fear," is a nice touch. It is always noticeable how much more liberal those who deal in God's command without his power are of his wrath than of his mercy. But we should never understand the Puritans if we did not bear in mind that they were still prisoners in that religion of Fear which casts out Love. The nearness of God was oftener a terror than a comfort to them. Yet perhaps in them was the last apparition of Faith as a wonder-worker

in human affairs. Take away from them what you will, you cannot deny them *that*, and its constant presence made them great in a way and measure of which this generation, it is to be feared, can have but a very inadequate conception. If men nowadays find their tone antipathetic, it would be modest at least to consider whether the fault be wholly theirs, — whether it was they who lacked, or we who have lost. Whether they were right or wrong in their dealing with the Quakers is not a question to be decided glibly after two centuries' struggle toward a conception of toleration very imperfect even yet, perhaps impossible to human nature. If they did not choose what seems to us the wisest way of keeping the Devil out of their household, they certainly had a very honest will to keep him out, which we might emulate with advantage. However it be in other cases, historic toleration must include intolerance among things to be tolerated.

The false notion which the first settlers had of the savages by whom the continent was beflead rather than inhabited, arose in part from what they had heard of Mexico and Peru, in part from the splendid exaggerations of the early travellers, who could give their readers an El Dorado at the cheap cost of a good lie. Hence the kings, dukes, and earls who were so plenty among the red men. Pride of descent

takes many odd shapes, none odder than when it hugs itself in an ancestry of filthy barbarians, who daubed themselves for ornament with a mixture of bear's-grease and soot, or colored clay, and were called emperors by Captain John Smith and his compeers. The droll contrast between this imaginary royalty and the squalid reality is nowhere exposed with more ludicrous unconsciousness than in the following passage of a letter from Fitz-John Winthrop to his father, November, 1674: "The bearer hereof, Mr. Danyell, one of the Royal Indian blood . . . does desire me to give an account to yourself of the late unhappy accident which has happened to him. A little time since, a careless girl playing with fire at the door, it immediately took hold of the mats, & in an instant consumed it to ashes, with all the common as well as his lady's chamber furniture, & his own wardrobe & armory, Indian plate, & money to the value (as is credibly reported in his estimation) of more than an hundred pounds Indian. . . . The Indians have handsomely already built him a good house & brought him in several necessaries for his present supply, but that which takes deepest melancholy impression upon him is the loss of an excellent Masathuset cloth cloak & hat, which was only seen upon holy days & their general sessions. His journey at this time is only to intreat your

favor & the gentlemen there for a kind relief in his necessity, having no kind of garment but a short jerkin which was charitably given him by one of his Common-Councilmen. He principally aims at a cloak & hat."

> "King Stephen was a worthy peer,
> His breeches cost him but a crown."

But it will be observed that there is no allusion to any such article of dress in the costume of this prince of Pequot. Some light is perhaps thrown on this deficiency by a line or two in one of Williams's letters, where he says: "I have long had scruples of selling the Natives ought but what may tend or bring to civilizing: I therefore neither brought nor shall sell them loose coats nor breeches." Precisely the opposite course was deemed effectual with the Highland Scotch, between whom and our Indians there was a very close analogy. They were compelled by law to adopt the usages of *Gallia Braccata*, and sansculottism made a penal offence. What impediment to civilization Williams had discovered in the offending garment it is hard to say. It is a question for Herr Teufelsdröck. Royalty, at any rate, in our day, is dependent for much of its success on the tailor. Williams's opportunities of studying the Indian character were perhaps greater than those of any other man of his time. He was always an advocate for justice toward them. But he seems to have

had no better opinion of them than Mr. Parkman,[1] calling them shortly and sharply, "wolves endowed with men's brains." The same change of feeling has followed the same causes in their case as in that of the Highlanders, — they have become romantic in proportion as they ceased to be dangerous.

As exhibitions of the writer's character, no letters in the collection have interested me more than those of John Tinker, who for many years was a kind of steward for John Winthrop and his son. They show him to have been a thoroughly faithful, grateful, and unselfish servant. He does not seem to have prospered except in winning respect, for when he died his funeral charges were paid by the public. We learn from one of his letters that John Winthrop, Jr., had a negro (presumably a slave) at Paquanet, for he says that a mad cow there "had almost spoiled the neger & made him ferfull to tend the rest of the cattell." That such slaves must have been rare, however, is plain from his constant complaints about the difficulty of procuring "help," some of which we have already quoted. His spelling of the word "ferfull" shows that the New England pronunciation of that word had been brought from the old country. He also uses the word "creatures" for kine, and the like, precisely as our farmers do

[1] In his *Jesuits in North America.*

now. There is one very comical passage in a letter of the 2d of August, 1660, where he says: "There hath been a motion by some, the chief of the town [New London], for my keeping an ordinary, or rather under the notion of a tavern, which, *though it suits not with my genius*, yet am almost persuaded to accept for some good grounds." Tinker's modesty is most creditable to him, and we wish it were more common now. No people on the face of the earth suffer so much as we from impostors who keep inconveniences, "under the notion of a tavern," without any call of natural genius thereto; none endure with such unexemplary patience the superb indifference of innkeepers, and the condescending inattention of their gentlemanly deputies. We are the thralls of our railroads and hotels, and we deserve it.

Richard Saltonstall writes to John Winthrop, Jr., in 1636: "The best thing that I have to beg your thoughts for at this present is a motto or two that Mr. Prynne hath writ upon his chamber walls in the Tower." We copy a few phrases, chiefly for the contrast they make with Lovelace's famous verses to Althea. Nothing could mark more sharply the different habits of mind in Puritan and Cavalier. Lovelace is very charming, but he sings

> "The sweetness, mercy, majesty,
> And glories of *his* King," —

to wit, Charles I. To him "stone walls do not a prison make," so long as he has "freedom in his love, and in his soul is free." Prynne's King was of another and higher kind: "*Carcer excludit mundum, includit Deum. Deus est turris etiam in turre: turris libertatis in turre angustiae: Turris quietis in turre molestiae. . . . Arctari non potest qui in ipsa Dei infinitate incarceratus spatiatur. . . . Nil crus sentit in nervo si animus sit in coelo: nil corpus patitur in ergastulo, si anima sit in Christo.*" If Lovelace has the advantage in fancy, Prynne has it as clearly in depth of sentiment. There could be little doubt which of the parties represented by these men would have the better if it came to a death-grapple.

There is curiously little sentiment in these volumes. Most of the letters, except where some point of doctrine is concerned, are those of shrewd, practical men, busy about the affairs of this world, and earnest to build their New Jerusalem on something more solid than cloud. The truth is, that men anxious about their souls have not been by any means the least skilful in providing for the wants of the body. It was far less the enthusiasm than the common sense of the Puritans which made them what they were in politics and religion. That a great change should be wrought in the settlers by the circumstances of their position was inevitable; that

this change should have had some disillusion in it, that it should have weaned them from the ideal and wonted them to the actual, was equally so. In 1664, not much more than a generation after the settlement, Williams prophesies: "When we that have been the eldest are rotting (to-morrow or next day), a generation will act, I fear, far unlike the first Winthrops and their models of love. I fear that the common trinity of the world (profit, preferment, pleasure) will here be the *tria omnia* as in all the world beside, that Prelacy and Papacy too will in this wilderness predominate, that god Land will be (as now it is) as great a god with us English as god Gold was with the Spaniards. While we are here, noble sir, let us *viriliter hoc agere*, *rem agere humanam*, *divinam*, *Christianam*, which, I believe, is all of a most public genius," or, as we should now say, true patriotism. If Williams means no play on the word *humanam* and *divinam*, the order of precedence in which he marshals them is noticeable. A generation later, what Williams had predicted was in a great measure verified. But what made New England Puritanism narrow was what made Scotch Cameronianism narrow, — its being secluded from the great movement of the nation. Till 1660 the colony was ruled and mostly inhabited by Englishmen closely connected with the party dominant in the mother country, and with their minds

broadened by having to deal with questions of state and European policy. After that time they sank rapidly into provincials, narrow in thought, in culture, in creed. Such a pedantic portent as Cotton Mather would have been impossible in the first generation; he was the natural growth of the third, — the manifest judgment of God on a generation who thought Words a saving substitute for Things. Perhaps some injustice has been done to men like the second Governor Dudley, and it should be counted to them rather as a merit than a fault, that they wished to bring New England back within reach of the invigorating influence of national sympathies, and to rescue it from a tradition which had become empty formalism. Puritanism was dead, and its profession had become a wearisome cant before the Revolution of 1688 gave it that vital force in politics which it had lost in religion.

I have gleaned all I could of what is morally picturesque or characteristic from these volumes, but New England history has rather a gregarious than a personal interest. Here, by inherent necessity rather than design, was made the first experiment in practical democracy, and accordingly hence began that reaction of the New World upon the Old whose result can hardly yet be estimated. There is here no temptation to make a hero, who shall sum up in his own

individuality and carry forward by his own will that purpose of which we seem to catch such bewitching glances in history, which reveals itself more clearly and constantly, perhaps, in the annals of New England than elsewhere, and which yet, at best, is but tentative, doubtful of itself, turned this way and that by chance, made up of instinct, and modified by circumstance quite as much as it is directed by deliberate forethought. Such a purpose, or natural craving, or result of temporary influences, may be misguided by a powerful character to his own ends, or, if he be strongly in sympathy with it, may be hastened toward its own fulfilment; but there is no such heroic element in our drama, and what is remarkable is, that, under whatever government, democracy grew with the growth of the New England Colonies, and was at last potent enough to wrench them, and the better part of the continent with them, from the mother country. It is true that Jefferson embodied in the Declaration of Independence the speculative theories he had learned in France, but the impulse to separation came from New England; and those theories had been long since embodied there in the practice of the people, if they had never been formulated in distinct propositions.

I have little sympathy with declaimers about the Pilgrim Fathers, who look upon them all

as men of grand conceptions and superhuman foresight. An entire ship's company of Columbuses is what the world never saw. It is not wise to form any theory and fit our facts to it, as a man in a hurry is apt to cram his travelling-bag, with a total disregard of shape or texture. But perhaps it may be found that the facts will only fit comfortably together on a single plan, namely, that the fathers did have a conception (which those will call grand who regard simplicity as a necessary element of grandeur) of founding here a commonwealth on those two eternal bases of Faith and Work; that they had, indeed, no revolutionary ideas of universal liberty, but yet, what answered the purpose quite as well, an abiding faith in the brotherhood of man and the fatherhood of God; and that they did not so much propose to make all things new, as to develop the latent possibilities of English law and English character, by clearing away the fences by which the abuse of the one was gradually discommoning the other from the broad fields of natural right. They were not in advance of their age, as it is called, for no one who is so can ever work profitably in it; but they were alive to the highest and most earnest thinking of their time.

LESSING

LESSING[1]

1866

WHEN Burns's humor gave its last pathetic flicker in his "John, don't let the awkward squad fire over me," was he thinking of actual brother volunteers, or of possible biographers? Did his words betray only the rhythmic sensitiveness of poetic nerves, or were they a foreboding of that helpless future, when the poet lies at the mercy of the plodder, of that bi-voluminous shape in which dulness overtakes and revenges itself on genius at last? Certainly Burns has suffered as much as most large-natured creatures from well-meaning efforts to account for him, to explain him away, to bring him into harmony with those well-regulated minds which, during a good part of the last

[1] *G. E. Lessing. Sein Leben und seine Werke.* Von Adolf Stahr. Vermehrte und verbesserte Volks-Ausgabe. Dritte Auflage. Berlin. 1864.

The Same. Translated by E. P. Evans, Ph. D., Professor, etc., in the University of Michigan. Boston: W. V. Spencer. 1866. 2 vols.

G. E. Lessing's Sämmtliche Schriften, herausgegeben von Karl Lachmann. 1853–57. 12 Bände.

century, found out a way, through rhyme, to snatch a prosiness beyond the reach of prose. Nay, he has been wronged also by that other want of true appreciation, which deals in panegyric, and would put asunder those two things which God has joined, the poet and the man, as if it were not the same rash improvidence that was the happiness of the verse and the misfortune of the gauger. But his death-bed was at least not haunted by the unappeasable apprehension of a German for his biographer; and that the fame of Lessing should have four times survived this cunningest assault of oblivion is proof enough that its base is broad and deep-set.

There seems to be, in the average German mind, an inability or a disinclination to see a thing as it really is, unless it be a matter of science. It finds its keenest pleasure in divining a profound significance in the most trifling things, and the number of mare's-nests that have been stared into by the German *Gelehrter* through his spectacles passes calculation. They are the one object of contemplation that makes that singular being perfectly happy, and they seem to be as common as those of the stork. In the dark forest of æsthetics, particularly, he finds them at every turn, — "fanno tutto il loco varo." If the greater part of our English criticism is apt only to skim the surface, the German, by way of being profound, too often burrows in delighted

darkness quite beneath its subject, till the reader feels the ground hollow beneath him, and is fearful of caving into unknown depths of stagnant metaphysic air at every step. The "Commentary on Shakespeare" of Gervinus, a really superior man, reminds one of the Roman Campagna, penetrated underground in all directions by strange winding caverns, the work of human borers in search of we know not what. Above are the divine poet's larks and daisies, his incommunicable skies, his broad prospects of life and Nature; and meanwhile our Teutonic *teredo* worms his way below, and offers to be our guide into an obscurity of his own contriving. The reaction of language upon style, and even upon thought, by its limitations on the one hand, and its suggestions on the other, is so apparent to any one who has made even a slight study of comparative literature, that I have sometimes thought the German tongue at least an accessory before the fact, if nothing more, in the offences of German literature. The language has such a fatal genius for going stern-foremost, for yawing, and for not minding the helm without some ten minutes' notice in advance, that he must be a great sailor indeed who can safely make it the vehicle for anything but imperishable commodities. Vischer's "Æsthetik," the best treatise on the subject, ancient or modern, is such a book as none but a German could write, and it is

written as none but a German could have written it. The abstracts of its sections are sometimes nearly as long as the sections themselves, and it is as hard to make out which head belongs to which tail, as in a knot of snakes thawing themselves into sluggish individuality under a spring sun. The average German professor spends his life in making lanterns fit to guide us through the obscurest passages of all the *ologies* and *ysics*, and there are none in the world of such honest workmanship. They are durable, they have intensifying glasses, reflectors of the most scientific make, capital sockets in which to set a light, and a handsome lump of potentially illuminating tallow is thrown in. But, in order to *see* by them, the explorer must make his own candle, supply his own cohesive wick of common sense, and light it himself. And yet the admirable thoroughness of the German intellect! We should be ungrateful indeed if we did not acknowledge that it has supplied the raw material in almost every branch of science for the defter wits of other nations to work on; yet I have a suspicion that there are certain lighter departments of literature in which it may be misapplied, and turn into something very like clumsiness. Delightful as Jean Paul's humor is, how much more so would it be if he only knew when to stop! Ethereally deep as is his sentiment, should we not feel it more if he sometimes

gave us a little less of it, — if he would only not always deal out his wine by beer-measure? *So* thorough is the German mind, that might it not seem now and then to work quite through its subject, and expatiate in cheerful unconsciousness on the other side thereof?

With all its merits of a higher and deeper kind, it yet seems to us that German literature has not quite satisfactorily answered that so long-standing question of the French abbé about *esprit*. Hard as it is for a German to be clear, still harder to be light, he is more than ever awkward in his attempts to produce that quality of style, so peculiarly French, which is neither wit nor liveliness taken singly, but a mixture of the two that must be drunk while the effervescence lasts, and will not bear exportation into any other language. German criticism, excellent in other respects, and immeasurably superior to that of any other nation in its constructive faculty, in its instinct for getting at whatever principle of life lies at the heart of a work of genius, is seldom lucid, almost never entertaining. It may turn its light, if we have patience, into every obscurest cranny of its subject, one after another, but it never flashes light *out* of the subject itself, as Sainte-Beuve, for example, so often does, and with such unexpected charm. We should be inclined to put Julian Schmidt at the head of living critics in all the more

essential elements of his outfit; but with him is not one conscious at too frequent intervals of the professorial grind, of that German tendency to bear on too heavily, where a French critic would touch and go with such exquisite measure? The Great Nation, as it cheerfully calls itself, is in nothing greater than in its talent for saying little things agreeably, which is perhaps the very top of mere culture, and in literature is the next best thing to the power of saying great things as easily as if they were little. German learning, like the elephants of Pyrrhus, is always in danger of turning upon what it was intended to adorn and reinforce, and trampling it ponderously to death. And yet what do we not owe it? Mastering all languages, all records of intellectual man, it has been able, or has enabled others, to strip away the husks of nationality and conventionalism from the literatures of many races, and to disengage that kernel of human truth which is the germinating principle of them all. Nay, it has taught us to recognize also a certain value in those very husks, whether as shelter for the unripe or food for the fallen seed.

That the general want of style in German authors is not wholly the fault of the language is shown by Heine (a man of mixed blood), who can be daintily light in German; that it is not altogether a matter of race, is clear from the

graceful airiness of Erasmus and Reuchlin in Latin, and of the Baron Grimm in French. The sense of heaviness which creeps over the reader from so many German books is mainly due, we suspect, to the language, which seems well-nigh incapable of that aërial perspective so delightful in first-rate French, and even English writing. But there must also be in the national character an insensibility to proportion, a want of that instinctive discretion which we call tact. Nothing short of this will account for the perpetual groping of German imaginative literature after some foreign mould in which to cast its thought or feeling, now trying a Louis Quatorze pattern, then something supposed to be Shakespearian, and at last going back to ancient Greece, or even Persia. Goethe himself, limpidly perfect as are many of his shorter poems, often fails in giving artistic coherence to his longer works. Leaving deeper qualities wholly out of the question, "Wilhelm Meister" seems a mere aggregation of episodes if compared with such a masterpiece as "Paul and Virginia," or even with a happy improvisation like the "Vicar of Wakefield." The second part of "Faust," too, is rather a reflection of Goethe's own changed view of life and man's relation to it, than a harmonious completion of the original conception. Full of placid wisdom and exquisite poetry it certainly is; but if we look at it as a

poem, it seems more as if the author had striven to get in all he could, than to leave out all he might. We cannot help asking what business have paper money and political economy and geognosy here? We confess that Thales and the Homunculus weary us not a little, unless, indeed, a poem be nothing, after all, but a prolonged conundrum. Many of Schiller's lyrical poems, though the best of them find no match in modern verse for rapid energy, the very axles of language kindling with swiftness, seem disproportionately long in parts, and the thought too often has the life well-nigh squeezed out of it in the sevenfold coils of diction, dappled though it be with splendid imagery.

In German sentiment, which runs over so easily into sentimentalism, a foreigner cannot help being struck with a certain incongruousness. What can be odder, for example, than the mixture of sensibility and sausages in some of Goethe's earlier notes to Frau von Stein, unless, to be sure, the publishing them? It would appear that Germans were less sensitive to the ludicrous — and we are far from saying that this may not have its compensatory advantages — than either the English or the French. And what is the source of this sensibility, if it be not an instinctive perception of the incongruous and disproportionate? Among all races, the English has ever shown itself most keenly alive to the

fear of making itself ridiculous; and among all, none has produced so many humorists, only one of them, indeed, so profound as Cervantes, yet all masters in their several ways. What English-speaking man, except Boswell, could have arrived at Weimar, as Goethe did, in that absurd *Werthermontirung?* And where, out of Germany, could he have found a reigning Grand Duke to put his whole court into the same sentimental livery of blue and yellow, leather breeches, boots, and all, excepting only Herder, and that not on account of his clerical profession, but of his age? To be sure, it might be asked also where else in Europe was a prince to be met with capable of manly friendship with a man whose only decoration was his genius? But the comicality of the other fact no less remains. Certainly the German character is in no way so little remarkable as for its humor. If we were to trust the evidence of Herr Hub's dreary "Deutsche komische und humoristische Dichtung," we should believe that no German had even so much as a suspicion of what humor meant, unless the book itself, as we are half inclined to suspect, be a joke in three volumes, the *want* of fun being the real point thereof. If German patriotism can be induced to find a grave delight in it, I congratulate Herr Hub's publishers, and for my own part advise any sober-minded man who may hereafter "be merry,"

not to "sing psalms," but to read Hub as the more serious amusement of the two. There are epigrams there that make life more solemn, and, if taken in sufficient doses, would make it more precarious. Even Jean Paul, the greatest of German humorous authors, and never surpassed in comic conception or in the pathetic quality of humor, is not to be named with his master, Sterne, as a creative humorist. What are Siebenkäs, Fixlein, Schmelzle, and Fibel (a single lay-figure to be draped at will with whimsical sentiment and reflection, and put in various attitudes), compared with the living reality of Walter Shandy and his brother Toby, characters which we do not see merely as puppets in the author's mind, but poetically projected from it in an independent being of their own? Heine himself, the most graceful, sometimes the most touching, of modern poets, and clearly the most easy of German humorists, seems to me wanting in a refined perception of that inward propriety which is only another name for poetic proportion, and shocks us sometimes with an *Unfläthigkeit*, as at the end of his "Deutschland," which, if it make Germans laugh, as we should be sorry to believe, makes other people hold their noses. Such things have not been possible in English since Swift, and the *persifleur* Heine cannot offer the same excuse of savage cynicism that might be pleaded for the Irishman.

I have hinted that Herr Stahr's "Life of Lessing" is not precisely the kind of biography that would have been most pleasing to the man who could not conceive that an author should be satisfied with anything more than truth in praise, or anything less in criticism. My respect for what Lessing was, and for what he did, is profound. In the history of literature it would be hard to find a man so stalwart, so kindly, so sincere,[1] so capable of great ideas, whether in their influence on the intellect or the life, so unswervingly true to the truth, so free from the common weaknesses of his class. Since Luther, Germany has given birth to no such intellectual athlete, no son so German to the core. Greater poets she has had, but no greater writer; no nature more finely tempered. Nay, may we not say that great character is as rare a thing as great genius, if it be not even a nobler form of it? For surely it is easier to embody fine thinking, or delicate sentiment, or lofty aspiration, in a book than in a life. The written leaf, if it be, as some few are, a safe-keeper and conductor of celestial fire, is secure. Poverty cannot pinch, passion swerve, or trial shake it. But the man Lessing, harassed and striving life-long, always poor and always hopeful, with no patron but

[1] "If I write at all, it is not possible for me to write otherwise than just as I think and feel." (Lessing to his father, 21st December, 1767.)

his own right hand, the very shuttlecock of fortune, who saw ruin's ploughshare drive through the hearth on which his first home-fire was hardly kindled, and who, through all, was faithful to himself, to his friend, to his duty, and to his ideal, is something more inspiring for us than the most glorious utterance of merely intellectual power. The figure of Goethe is grand, it is rightfully preëminent, it has something of the calm, and something of the coldness, of the immortals; but the Valhalla of German letters can show one form, in its simple manhood, statelier even than his.

Manliness and simplicity, if they are not necessary coefficients in producing character of the purest tone, were certainly leading elements in the Lessing who is still so noteworthy and lovable to us when eighty-six years have passed since his bodily presence vanished from among men. He loved clearness, he hated exaggeration in all its forms. He was the first German who had any conception of style, and who could be full without spilling over on all sides. Herr Stahr, I think, is not just the biographer he would have chosen for himself. His book is rather a panegyric than a biography. There is sometimes an almost comic disproportion between the matter and the manner, especially in the epic details of Lessing's onslaughts on the nameless herd of German authors. It is as if

Sophocles should have given a strophe to every bullock slain by Ajax in his mad foray upon the Grecian commissary stores. He is too fond of striking an attitude, and his tone rises unpleasantly near a scream, as he calls the personal attention of heaven and earth to something which Lessing himself would have thought a very matter-of-course affair. He who lays it down as an axiom, that "genius loves simplicity," would hardly have been pleased to hear the "Letters on Literature" called the "burning thunderbolts of his annihilating criticism," or the Anti-Götze pamphlets, "the hurtling arrows that sped from the bow of the immortal hero." Nor would he with whom accuracy was a matter of conscience have heard patiently that the Letters "appeared in a period distinguished for its lofty tone of mind, and in their own towering boldness they are a true picture of the intrepid character of the age."[1] If the age was what Herr Stahr represents it to have been, where is the great merit of Lessing? He would have smiled, we suspect, a little contemptuously, at Herr Stahr's repeatedly quoting a certificate from the "historian of the proud Britons," that he was "the first critic in Europe." Whether

[1] "I am sure that Kleist would rather have taken another wound with him into his grave than have such stuff jabbered over him (*sich solch Zeug nachschwatzen lassen*"). (Lessing to Gleim, 6th September, 1759.)

we admit or not Lord Macaulay's competence in the matter, we are sure that Lessing would not have thanked his biographer for this soup-ticket to a ladleful of fame. If ever a man stood firmly on his own feet, and asked help of none, that man was Gotthold Ephraim Lessing.

Herr Stahr's desire to *make* a hero of his subject and his love for sonorous sentences like those we have quoted above are apt to stand somewhat in the way of our chance at taking a fair measure of the man, and seeing in what his heroism really lay. He furnishes little material for a comparative estimate of Lessing, or for judging of the foreign influences which helped from time to time in making him what he was. Nothing is harder than to worry out a date from Herr Stahr's hay stacks of praise and quotation. Yet dates are of special value in tracing the progress of an intellect like Lessing's, which, little actuated by an inward creative energy, was commonly stirred to motion by the impulse of other minds, and struck out its brightest flashes by collision with them. He himself tells us that a critic should "first seek out some one with whom he can contend," and quotes in justification from one of Aristotle's commentators, *Solet Aristoteles quaerere pugnam in suis libris*. This Lessing was always wont to do. He could only feel his own strength, and make others feel it, could only call it into full play in an intellectual wrestling-bout.

He was always anointed and ready for the ring, but with this distinction, that he was no mere prize-fighter, or bully for the side that would pay him best, nor even a contender for mere sentiment, but a self-forgetful champion for the truth as he saw it. Nor is this true of him only as a critic. His more purely imaginative works, his "Minna," his "Emilia," his "Nathan," were all written, not to satisfy the craving of a poetic instinct, nor to rid head and heart of troublous guests by building them a lodging outside himself, as Goethe used to do, but to prove some thesis of criticism or morals by which Truth could be served. His zeal for her was perfectly unselfish. "Does one write, then, for the sake of being always in the right? I think I have been as serviceable to Truth," he says, "when I miss her, and my failure is the occasion of another's discovering her, as if I had discovered her myself." [1] One would almost be inclined to think, from Herr Stahr's account of the matter, that Lessing had been an autochthonous birth of the German soil, without intellectual ancestry or helpful kindred. That this is the sufficient natural history of no original mind need hardly be said, since originality consists quite as much in the power of using to purpose what it finds ready to its hand, as in that of producing what is absolutely new. Perhaps

[1] Letter to Klotz, 9th June, 1766.

we might say that it was nothing more than the faculty of combining the separate, and therefore ineffectual, conceptions of others, and making them into living thought by the breath of its own organizing spirit. A great man without a past, if he be not an impossibility, will certainly have no future. He would be like those conjectural Miltons and Cromwells of Gray's imaginary hamlet. The only privilege of the original man is, that, like other sovereign princes, he has the right to call in the current coin and reissue it stamped with his own image, as was the practice of Lessing.

Herr Stahr's over-intensity of phrase is less offensive than amusing when applied to Lessing's early efforts in criticism. Speaking of poor old Gottsched, he says: "Lessing assailed him sometimes with cutting criticism, and again with exquisite humor. In the notice of Gottsched's poems, he says, among other things, 'The exterior of the volume is so handsome that it will do great credit to the bookstores, and it is to be hoped that it will continue to do so for a long time. But to give a satisfactory idea of the interior surpasses our powers.' And in conclusion he adds, 'These poems cost two thalers and four groschen. The two thalers pay for the ridiculous, and the four groschen pretty much for the useful.'" Again, he tells us that Lessing concludes his notice of Klopstock's "Ode to God"

"with these inimitably roguish words: 'What presumption to beg thus earnestly for a woman!' Does not a whole book of criticism lie in these nine words?" For a young man of twenty-two, Lessing's criticisms show a great deal of independence and maturity of thought; but humor he never had, and his wit was always of the bluntest, crushing rather than cutting. The mace, and not the scimitar, was his weapon. Let Herr Stahr put all Lessing's "inimitably roguish words" together, and compare them with these few untranslatable lines from Voltaire's letter to Rousseau, thanking him for his "Discours sur l'Inégalité": "On n'a jamais employé tant d'esprit à vouloir nous rendre bêtes; il prend envie de marcher à quatre pattes quand on lit votre ouvrage." Lessing from the first was something far better than a wit. Force was always much more characteristic of him than cleverness. Sometimes Herr Stahr's hero-worship leads him into positive misstatement. For example, speaking of Lessing's Preface to the "Contributions to the History and Reform of the Theatre," he tells us that "his eye was directed chiefly to the English theatre and Shakespeare." Lessing at that time (1749) was only twenty, and knew little more than the names of any foreign dramatists except the French. In this very Preface his English list skips from Shakespeare to Dryden, and in the Spanish he

omits Calderon, Tirso de Molina, and Alarcon. Accordingly, we suspect that the date is wrongly assigned to Lessing's translation of "La Vida es Sueño." His mind was hardly yet ready to feel the strange charm of this most imaginative of Calderon's dramas.

Even where Herr Stahr undertakes to give us light on the *sources* of Lessing, it is something of the dimmest. He attributes "Miss Sara Sampson" to the influence of the "Merchant of London," as Mr. Evans translates it literally from the German, meaning our old friend, "George Barnwell." But I am strongly inclined to suspect from internal evidence that Moore's more recent "Gamester" gave the prevailing impulse. And if Herr Stahr must needs tell us anything of the Tragedy of Middle-Class Life, he ought to have known that on the English stage it preceded Lillo by more than a century, — witness the "Yorkshire Tragedy," — and that something very like it was even much older in France. One may fairly complain, also, that he does not bring out more clearly how much Lessing owed to Diderot both as dramatist and critic, nor give us so much as a hint of what already existing English criticism did for him in the way of suggestion and guidance. But though I feel it to be my duty to say so much of Herr Stahr's positive faults and negative shortcomings, yet we leave him in very good

humor. While he is altogether too full upon certain points of merely transitory importance, — such as the quarrel with Klotz, — yet we are bound to thank him both for the abundance of his extracts from Lessing, and for the judgment he has shown in the choice of them. Any one not familiar with his writings will be able to get a very good notion of the quality of his mind, and the amount of his literary performance, from these volumes; and that, after all, is the chief matter. As to the absolute merit of his works other than critical, Herr Stahr's judgment is too much at the mercy of his partiality to be of great value.

Of Mr. Evans's translation I can speak for the most part with high commendation. There are great difficulties in translating German prose; and whatever other good things Herr Stahr may have learned from Lessing, terseness and clearness are not among them. I have seldom seen a translation which read more easily, or was generally more faithful. That Mr. Evans should nod now and then I do not wonder, nor that he should sometimes choose the wrong word. I have only compared him with the original where I saw reason for suspecting a slip; but, though I have not found much to complain of, I have found enough to satisfy me that his book will gain by a careful revision. I select a few oversights, mainly from the first volume, as examples.

On page 34, comparing Lessing with Goethe on arriving at the University, Mr. Evans, I think, obscures, if he does not wholly lose the meaning, when he translates *Leben* by "social relations," and is altogether wrong in rendering *Patrizier* by "aristocrat." At the top of the next page, too, "suspicious" is not the word for *bedenklich*. Had he been writing English, he would surely have said "questionable." On page 47, "overtrodden shoes" is hardly so good as the idiomatic "down at the heel." On page 104, "A very humorous representation" is oddly made to "confirm the documentary evidence." The reverse is meant. On page 115, the sentence beginning "the tendency in both" needs revising. On page 138, Mr. Evans speaks of the "Poetical Village-younker of Destouches." This, I think, is hardly the English of *Le Poète Campagnard*, and almost recalls Lieberkühn's theory of translation, toward which Lessing was so unrelenting,—"When I do not understand a passage, why, I translate it word for word." On page 149, "Miss Sara Sampson" is called "the first social tragedy of the German Drama." All tragedies surely are *social*, except the "Prometheus." *Bürgerliche Tragödie* means a tragedy in which the protagonist is taken from common life, and perhaps cannot be translated clearly into English except by "tragedy of middle-class life." So on page 170 we find

"Emilia Galotti" called a "Virginia *bourgeoise*," and on page 172 a hospital becomes a *lazaretto*. On page 190 we have a sentence ending in this strange fashion: "in an episode of the English original, which Wieland omitted entirely, one of its characters nevertheless appeared in the German tragedy." On page 205 we have the Seven Years' War called "a bloody *process*." This is mere carelessness, for Mr. Evans, in the second volume, translates it rightly "*lawsuit*." What English reader would know what "You are intriguing me" means, on page 228? On page 264, vol. ii., I find a passage inaccurately rendered, which I consider of more consequence, because it is a quotation from Lessing. "O, out upon the man who claims, Almighty God, to be a preacher of Thy word, and yet so impudently asserts that, in order to attain Thy purposes, there was only one way in which it pleased *Thee* to make *Thyself* known to him!" This is very far from *nur den einzigen Weg gehabt den Du Dir gefallen lassen ihm kund zu machen!* The *ihm* is scornfully emphatic. I hope Professor Evans will go over his version for a second edition much more carefully than I have had any occasion to do. He has done an excellent service to our literature, for which we may heartily thank him, in choosing a book of this kind to translate, and translating it so well. I would not look such a gift horse too narrowly in the mouth.

Let me now endeavor to sum up the result of Lessing's life and labor with what success I may.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born (January 22, 1729) at Camenz, in Upper Lusatia, the second child and eldest son of John Gottfried Lessing, a Lutheran clergyman. Those who believe in the persistent qualities of race, or the cumulative property of culture, will find something to their purpose in his Saxon blood and his clerical and juristic ancestry. It is worth mentioning, that his grandfather, in the thesis for his doctor's degree, defended the right to entire freedom of religious belief. The name first comes to the surface in Parson Clement Lessigk, nearly three centuries ago, and survives to the present day in a painter of some distinction. It has almost passed into a proverb, that the mothers of remarkable children have been something beyond the common. If there be any truth in the theory, the case of Lessing was an exception, as might have been inferred, perhaps, from the peculiarly masculine type of his character and intellect. His mother was in no wise superior, but his father seems to have been a man somewhat above the pedantic average of the provincial clergymen of his day, and to have been a scholar in the ampler meaning of the word. Besides the classics, he had possessed himself of French and English, and was somewhat versed in the Oriental languages. The tem-

per of his theology may be guessed from his having been, as his son tells us with some pride, one of "the earliest translators of Tillotson." We can only conjecture him from the letters which Lessing wrote to him, from which I should fancy him as on the whole a decided and even choleric old gentleman, in whom the wig, though not a predominant, was yet a notable feature, and who was, like many other fathers, permanently astonished at the fruit of his loins. He would have preferred one of the so-called learned professions for his son,—theology above all,—and would seem to have never quite reconciled himself to his son's distinction, as being in none of the three careers which alone were legitimate. Lessing's bearing towards him, always independent, is really beautiful in its union of respectful tenderness with unswerving self-assertion. When he wished to evade the maternal eye, Gotthold used in his letters to set up a screen of Latin between himself and her; and we conjecture the worthy Pastor Primarius playing over again in his study at Camenz, with some scruples of conscience, the old trick of Chaucer's cock:—

> "Mulier est hominis confusio;
> Madam, the sentence of this Latin is,
> Woman is mannës joy and mannës bliss."

He appears to have snatched a fearful and but ill-concealed joy from the sight of the first col-

lected edition of his son's works, unlike Tillotson as they certainly were. Ah, had they only been *Opera!* Yet were they not volumes, after all, and able to stand on their own edges beside the immortals, if nothing more?

After grinding with private tutor Mylius the requisite time, Lessing entered the school of Camenz, and in his thirteenth year was sent to the higher institution at Meissen. We learn little of his career there, except that Theophrastus, Plautus, and Terence were already his favorite authors, that he once characteristically distinguished himself by a courageous truthfulness, and that he wrote a Latin poem on the valor of the Saxon soldiers, which his father very sensibly advised him to shorten. In 1750, four years after leaving the school, he writes to his father: "I believed even when I was at Meissen that one must learn much there which he cannot make the least use of in real life (*der Welt*), and I now [after trying Leipzig and Wittenberg] see it all the more clearly,"—a melancholy observation which many other young men have made under similar circumstances. Sent to Leipzig in his seventeenth year, he finds himself an awkward, ungainly lad, and sets diligently to perfecting himself in the somewhat unscholastic accomplishments of riding, dancing, and fencing. He also sedulously frequents the theatre, and wrote a play, "The Young Scholar," which attained

the honor of representation. Meanwhile his most intimate companion was a younger brother of his old tutor Mylius, a young man of more than questionable morals, and who had even written a satire on the elders of Camenz, for which — over-confidently trusting himself in the outraged city — he had been fined and imprisoned; so little could the German Muse, celebrated by Klopstock for her swiftness of foot, protect her son. With this scandalous person and with play-actors, more than probably of both sexes, did the young Lessing share a Christmas cake sent him by his mother. Such news was not long in reaching Camenz, and we can easily fancy how tragic it seemed in the little parsonage there, to what cabinet councils it gave rise in the paternal study, to what ominous shaking of the clerical wig in that domestic Olympus. A pious fraud is practised on the boy, who hurries home thinly clad through the winter weather, his ill-eaten Christmas cake wringing him with remorseful indigestion, to receive the last blessing, if such a prodigal might hope for it, of a broken-hearted mother. He finds the good dame in excellent health, and softened toward him by a cold he has taken on his pious journey. He remains at home several months, now writing Anacreontics of such warmth that his sister (as volunteer representative of the common hangman) burns them in the family stove;

now composing sermons to convince his mother that "he could be a preacher any day," — a theory of that sacred office unhappily not yet extinct. At Easter, 1747, he gets back to Leipzig again, with some scant supply of money in his pocket, but is obliged to make his escape thence between two days somewhere toward the middle of the next year, leaving behind him some histrionic debts (chiefly, we fear, of a certain Mademoiselle Lorenz) for which he had confidingly made himself security. Stranded, by want of floating or other capital, at Wittenberg, he enters himself, with help from home, as a student there, but soon migrates again to Berlin, which had been his goal when making his hegira from Leipzig. In Berlin he remained three years, applying himself to his chosen calling of author at all work, by doing whatever honest job offered itself, — verse, criticism, or translation, — and profitably studious in a very wide range of languages and their literature. Above all, he learned the great secret, which his stalwart English contemporary, Johnson, also acquired, of being able to "dine heartily" for threepence.

Meanwhile he continues in a kind of colonial dependence on the parsonage at Camenz, the bonds gradually slackening, sometimes shaken a little rudely, and always giving alarming hints of approaching and inevitable autonomy. From

the few home letters of Lessing which remain (covering the period before 1753, there are only eight in all), we are able to surmise that a pretty constant maternal cluck and shrill paternal warning were kept up from the home coop. We find Lessing defending the morality of the stage and his own private morals against charges and suspicions of his parents, and even making the awful confession that he does not consider the Christian religion itself as a thing "to be taken on trust," nor a Christian by mere tradition so valuable a member of society as "one who has *prudently* doubted, and by the way of examination has arrived at conviction, or at least striven to arrive." Boyish scepticism of the superficial sort is a common phenomenon enough, but the Lessing variety of it seems to me sufficiently rare in a youth of twenty. What strikes me mainly in the letters of these years is not merely the maturity they show, though that is remarkable, but the tone. We see already in them the cheerful and never overweening self-confidence which always so pleasantly distinguished Lessing, and that strength of tackle, so seldom found in literary men, which brings the mind well home to its anchor, enabling it to find holding-ground and secure riding in any sea. "What care I to live in plenty," he asks gayly, "if I only live?" Indeed, Lessing learned early, and never forgot, that whoever would be life's master, and not its

drudge, must make it a means, and never allow it to become an end. He could say more truly than Goethe, *Mein Acker ist die Zeit*, since he not only sowed in it the seed of thought for other men and other times, but cropped it for his daily bread. Above all, we find Lessing even thus early endowed with the power of keeping his eyes wide open to what he was after, to what would help or hinder him, — a much more singular gift than is commonly supposed. Among other jobs of this first Berlin period, he had undertaken to arrange the library of a certain Herr Rüdiger, getting therefor his meals and "other receipts," whatever they may have been. His father seems to have heard with anxiety that this arrangement had ceased, and Lessing writes to him: "I never wished to have anything to do with this old man longer than *until I had made myself thoroughly acquainted with his great library*. This is now accomplished, and we have accordingly parted." This was in his twenty-first year, and I have no doubt, from the *range* of scholarship which Lessing had at command so young, that it was perfectly true. All through his life he was thoroughly German in this respect also, that he never *quite* smelted his knowledge clear from some slag of learning.

In the early part of the first Berlin residence, Pastor Primarius Lessing, hearing that his son meditated a movement on Vienna, was much

exercised with fears of the temptation to Popery he would be exposed to in that capital. I suspect that the attraction thitherward had its source in a perhaps equally catholic, but less theological magnet, — the Mademoiselle Lorenz above mentioned. Let us remember the perfectly innocent passion of Mozart for an actress, and be comforted. There is not the slightest evidence that Lessing's life at this time, or any other, though careless, was in any way debauched. No scandal was ever coupled with his name, nor is any biographic chemistry needed to bleach spots out of his reputation. What cannot be said of Wieland, of Goethe, of Schiller, of Jean Paul, may be safely affirmed of this busy and single-minded man. The parental fear of Popery brought him a seasonable supply of money from home, which enabled him to clothe himself decently enough to push his literary fortunes, and put on a bold front with publishers. Poor enough he often was, but never in so shabby a pass that he was forced to write behind a screen, like Johnson.

It was during this first stay in Berlin that Lessing was brought into personal relations with Voltaire. Through an acquaintance with the great man's secretary, Richier, he was employed as translator in the scandalous Hirschel lawsuit, so dramatically set forth by Carlyle in his "Life of Frederick," though Lessing's share in it

seems to have been unknown to him. The service could hardly have been other than distasteful to him; but it must have been with some thrill of the *anche io!* kind that the poor youth, just fleshing his maiden pen in criticism, stood face to face with the famous author, with whose name all Europe rang from side to side. This was in February, 1751. Young as he was, we fancy those cool eyes of his making some strange discoveries as to the real nature of that lean nightmare of Jesuits and dunces. Afterwards the same secretary lent him the manuscript of the "Siècle de Louis XIV.," and Lessing thoughtlessly taking it into the country with him, it was not forthcoming when called for by the author. Voltaire naturally enough danced with rage, screamed all manner of unpleasant things about robbery and the like, cashiered the secretary, and was, I see no reason to doubt, really afraid of a pirated edition. *This* time his cry of wolf must have had a quaver of sincerity in it. Herr Stahr, who can never keep separate the Lessing as he then was and the Lessing as he afterwards became, takes fire at what he chooses to consider an unworthy suspicion of the Frenchman, and treats himself to some rather cheap indignation on the subject. For myself, I think Voltaire altogether in the right, and I respect Lessing's honesty too much to suppose, with his biographer, that it was this

which led him, years afterwards, to do such severe justice to "Merope," and other tragedies of the same author. The affair happened in December, 1752, and a year later Lessing calls Voltaire a "great man" and says of his "Amalie" that "it has not only beautiful passages, it is beautiful throughout, and the tears of a reader of feeling will justify our judgment." Surely there is no resentment here. The only ground for wonder would be its being written after the Hirschel business. At any rate, we cannot allow Herr Stahr to shake our faith in the sincerity of Lessing's motives in criticism, — he could not in the soundness of the criticism itself, — by tracing it up to a spring at once so petty and so personal.

During a part of 1752,[1] Lessing was at Wittenberg again as student of medicine, the parental notion of a strictly professional career of some kind not having yet been abandoned. We must give his father the credit of having

[1] Herr Stahr heads the fifth chapter of his Second Book, "Lessing at Wittenberg. December, 1751, to November, 1752." But we never feel quite sure of his dates. The Richier affair puts Lessing in Berlin in December, 1751, and he took his Master's degree at Wittenberg, 29th April, 1752. We are told that he finally left Wittenberg "toward the end" of that year. He himself, writing from Berlin in 1754, says that he has been absent from that city *nur ein halbes Jahr* since 1748. There is only one letter for 1752, dated at Wittenberg, 9th June.

done his best, in a well-meaning paternal fashion, to make his son over again in his own image, and to thwart the design of Nature by coaxing or driving him into the pinfold of a prosperous obscurity. But Gotthold, with all his gifts, had no talent whatever for contented routine. His was a mind always in solution, which the divine order of things, as it is called, could not precipitate into any of the traditional forms of crystallization, and in which the time to come was already fermenting. The principle of growth was in the young literary hack, and he must obey it or die. His was to the last a *natura naturans*, never a *naturata*. Lessing seems to have done what he could to be a dutiful failure. But there was something in him stronger and more sacred than even filial piety; and the good old pastor is remembered now only as the father of a son who would have shared the benign oblivion of his own theological works, if he could only have had his wise way with him. Even after never so many biographies and review articles, genius continues to be a marvellous and inspiring thing. At the same time, considering the then condition of what was pleasantly called literature in Germany, there was not a little to be said on the paternal side of the question, though it may not seem now a very heavy mulct to give up one son out of ten to immortality, — at least

the Fates seldom decimate in *this* way. Lessing had now, if we accept the common standard in such matters, "completed his education," and the result may be summed up in his own words to Michaelis, 16th October, 1754: "I have studied at the Fürstenschule at Meissen, and after that at Leipzig and Wittenberg. But I should be greatly embarrassed if I were asked to tell *what*." As early as his twentieth year he had arrived at some singular notions as to the uses of learning. On the 20th of January, 1749, he writes to his mother: "I found out, that books, indeed, would make me learned, *but never make me a man*." Like most men of great knowledge, as distinguished from mere scholars, he seems to have been always a rather indiscriminate reader, and to have been fond, as Johnson was, of "browsing" in libraries. Johnson neither in amplitude of literature nor exactness of scholarship could be deemed a match for Lessing; but they were alike in the power of readily applying whatever they had learned, whether for purposes of illustration or argument. They resemble each other, also, in a kind of absolute common sense, and in the force with which they could plant a direct blow with the whole weight both of their training and their temperament behind it. As a critic, Johnson ends where Lessing begins. The one is happy in the lower region of the understand-

ing: the other can breathe freely in the ampler air of reason alone. Johnson acquired learning, and stopped short through indolence at a certain point. Lessing assimilated it, and accordingly his education ceased only with his life. Both had something of the intellectual sluggishness that is apt to go with great strength; and both had to be baited by the antagonism of circumstances or opinions, not only into the exhibition, but into the possession of their entire force. Both may be more properly called original men than, in the highest sense, original writers.

From 1752 to 1760, with an interval of something over two years spent in Leipzig to be near a good theatre, Lessing was settled in Berlin, and gave himself wholly and earnestly to the life of a man of letters. A thoroughly healthy, cheerful nature he most surely had, with something at first of the careless light-heartedness of youth. Healthy he was not always to be, not always cheerful, often very far from light-hearted, but manly from first to last he eminently was. Downcast he could never be, for his strongest instinct, invaluable to him also as a critic, was to see things as they really are. And this not in the sense of a cynic, but of one who measures himself as well as his circumstances, — who loves truth as the most beautiful of all things and the only permanent

possession, as being of one substance with the soul. In a man like Lessing, whose character is even more interesting than his works, the tone and turn of thought are what we like to get glimpses of. And for this his letters are more helpful than those of most authors, as might be expected of one who said of himself, that, in his more serious work, "he must profit by his first heat to accomplish anything." He began, I say, light-heartedly. He did not believe that "one should thank God only for good things." "He who is only in good health, and is willing to work, has nothing to fear in the world." "What another man would call want, I call comfort." "Must not one often act thoughtlessly, if one would provoke Fortune to do something for him?" In his first inexperience, the life of "the sparrow on the house-top" (which we find oddly translated "roof") was the one he would choose for himself. Later in life, when he wished to marry, he was of another mind, and perhaps discovered that there was something in the old father's notion of a fixed position. "The life of the sparrow on the house-top is only right good if one need not expect any end to it. If it cannot always last, every day it lasts too long,"—he writes to Ebert in 1770. Yet even then he takes the manly view. "Everything in the world has its time, everything may be overlived

and overlooked, if one only have health." Nor let any one suppose that Lessing, full of courage as he was, found professional authorship a garden of Alcinoüs. From creative literature he continually sought refuge, and even repose, in the driest drudgery of mere scholarship. On the 26th of April, 1768, he writes to his brother with something of his old gayety: "Thank God, the time will soon come when I cannot call a penny in the world my own but I must first earn it. I am unhappy if it must be by writing." And again in May, 1771: "Among all the wretched, I think him the most wretched who must work with his head, even if he is not conscious of having one. But what is the good of complaining?" Lessing's life, if it is a noble example, so far as it concerned himself alone, is also a warning when another is to be asked to share it. He too would have profited had he earlier learned and more constantly borne in mind the profound wisdom of that old saying, *Si sit prudentia*. Let the young poet, however he may believe of his art that "all other pleasures are not worth its pains," consider well what it is to call down fire from heaven to keep the pot boiling, before he commit himself to a life of authorship as something fine and easy. That fire will not condescend to such office, though it comes without asking on ceremonial days to the free service of the altar.

Lessing, however, never would, even if he could, have so desecrated his better powers. For a bare livelihood, he always went sturdily to the market of hack-work, where his learning would fetch him a price. But it was only in extremest need that he would claim that benefit of clergy. "I am worried," he writes to his brother Karl, 8th April, 1773, "and work because working is the only means to cease being so. But you and Voss are very much mistaken if you think that it could ever be indifferent to me, under such circumstances, on what I work. Nothing less true, whether as respects the work itself or the principal object wherefor I work. I have been in my life before now in very wretched circumstances, yet never in such that I would have written for bread in the true meaning of the word. I have begun my 'Contributions' because this work helps me . . . to live from one day to another." It is plain that he does not call this kind of thing in any high sense writing. Of that he had far other notions; for though he honestly disclaimed the title, yet his dream was always to be a poet. But he *was* willing to work, as he claimed to be, because he had one ideal higher than that of being a poet, namely, to be thoroughly a man. To Nicolai he writes in 1758: "All ways of earning his bread are alike becoming to an honest man, whether to split wood or to sit at the helm of

state. It does not concern his conscience how useful he is, but how useful he would be." Goethe's poetic sense was the Minotaur to which he sacrificed everything. To make a study, he would soil the maiden petals of a woman's soul; to get the delicious sensation of a reflex sorrow, he would wring a heart. All that saves his egoism from being hateful is, that, with its immense reaches, it cheats the sense into a feeling of something like sublimity. A patch of sand is unpleasing; a desert has all the awe of ocean. Lessing also felt the duty of self-culture; but it was not so much for the sake of feeding fat this or that faculty as of strengthening character, the only soil in which real mental power can root itself and find sustenance. His advice to his brother Karl, who was beginning to write for the stage, is two parts moral to one literary. "Study ethics diligently, learn to express yourself well and correctly, and cultivate your own character. Without that I cannot conceive a good dramatic author." Marvellous counsel this will seem to those who think that wisdom is only to be found in the fool's paradise of Bohemia!

I said that Lessing's dream was to be a poet. In comparison with success as a dramatist, he looked on all other achievement as inferior in kind. In 1767 he writes to Gleim (speaking of his call to Hamburg): "Such circumstances

were needed to rekindle in me an almost extinguished love for the theatre. I was just beginning to lose myself in other studies which would have made me unfit for any work of genius. My 'Laocoön' is now a secondary labor." And yet he never fell into the mistake of overvaluing what he valued so highly. His unflinching common sense would have saved him from that, as it afterwards enabled him to see that something was wanting in him which must enter into the making of true poetry, whose distinction from prose is an inward one of nature, and not an outward one of form. While yet under thirty, he assures Mendelssohn that he was quite right in neglecting poetry for philosophy, because "only a part of our youth should be given up to the arts of the beautiful. We must practise ourselves in weightier things before we die. An old man, who lifelong has done nothing but rhyme, and an old man who lifelong has done nothing but pass his breath through a stick with holes in it, — I doubt much whether such an old man has arrived at what he was meant for."

This period of Lessing's life was a productive one, though none of its printed results can be counted of permanent value, except his share in the "Letters on German Literature." And even these must be reckoned as belonging to the years of his apprenticeship and training for

the master-workman he afterwards became. The small fry of authors and translators were hardly fitted to call out his full strength, but his vivisection of them taught him the value of certain structural principles. "To one dissection of the fore quarter of an ass," says Haydon in his diary, "I owe my information." Yet even in his earliest criticisms we are struck with the same penetration and steadiness of judgment, the same firm grasp of the essential and permanent, that were afterwards to make his opinions law in the courts of taste. For example, he says of Thomson, that, "as a dramatic poet, he had the fault of never knowing when to leave off; he lets every character talk so long as anything can be said; accordingly, during these prolonged conversations, the action stands still, and the story becomes tedious." Of "Roderick Random," he says that "its author is neither a Richardson nor a Fielding; he is one of those writers of whom there are plenty among the Germans and French." I cite these merely because their firmness of tone seems to us uncommon in a youth of twenty-four. In the "Letters," the range is much wider, and the application of principles more consequent. He had already secured for himself a position among the literary men of that day, and was beginning to be feared for the inexorable justice of his criticisms. His "Fables" and his "Miss

Sara Sampson" had been translated into French, and had attracted the attention of Grimm, who says of them (December, 1754): "These Fables commonly contain in a few lines a new and profound moral meaning. M. Lessing has much wit, genius, and invention; the dissertations which follow the Fables prove moreover that he is an excellent critic." In Berlin, Lessing made friendships, especially with Mendelssohn, Von Kleist, Nicolai, Gleim, and Ramler. For Mendelssohn and Von Kleist he seems to have felt a real love; for the others at most a liking, as the best material that could be had. It certainly was not of the juiciest. He seems to have worked hard and played hard, equally at home in his study and Baumann's wine-cellar. He was busy, poor, and happy.

But he was restless. I suspect that the necessity of forever picking up crumbs, and their occasional scarcity, made the life of the sparrow on the house-top less agreeable than he had expected. The imagined freedom was not quite so free after all, for necessity is as short a tether as dependence, or official duty, or what not, and the regular occupation of grub-hunting is as tame and wearisome as another. Moreover, Lessing had probably by this time sucked his friends dry of any intellectual stimulus they could yield him; and when friendship reaches that pass, it is apt to be anything but inspiring.

Except Mendelssohn and Von Kleist, they were not men capable of rating him at his true value; and Lessing was one of those who always burn up the fuel of life at a fearful rate. Admirably dry as the supplies of Ramler and the rest no doubt were, they had not substance enough to keep his mind at the high temperature it needed, and he would soon be driven to the cutting of green stuff from his own wood-lot, more rich in smoke than fire. Besides this, he could hardly have been at ease among intimates most of whom could not even conceive of that intellectual honesty, that total disregard of all personal interests where truth was concerned, which was an innate quality of Lessing's mind. Their theory of criticism was, Truth, or even worse if possible, for all who do not belong to our set; for us, that delicious falsehood which is no doubt a slow poison, but then so *very* slow. Their nerves were unbraced by that fierce democracy of thought, trampling on all prescription, all tradition, in which Lessing loved to shoulder his way and advance his insupportable foot. "What is called a heretic," he says in his Preface to "Berengarius," "has a very good side. It is a man who at least *wishes* to see with his own eyes." And again, "I know not if it be a duty to offer up fortune and life to the truth; . . . but I know it *is* a duty, if one undertake to teach the truth, to teach the whole of it, or none

at all." Such men as Gleim and Ramler were mere *dilettanti*, and could have no notion how sacred his convictions are to a militant thinker like Lessing. His creed as to the rights of friendship in criticism might be put in the words of Selden, the firm tread of whose mind was like his own: "Opinion and affection extremely differ. Opinion is something wherein I go about to give reason why all the world should think as I think. Affection is a thing wherein I look after the pleasure of myself." How little his friends were capable of appreciating this view of the matter is plain from a letter of Ramler to Gleim, cited by Herr Stahr. Lessing had shown up the weaknesses of a certain work by the Abbé Batteux (long ago gathered to his literary fathers as conclusively as poor old Ramler himself), without regard to the important fact that the Abbé's book had been translated by a friend. Horrible to think of at best, thrice horrible when the friend's name was Ramler! The impression thereby made on the friendly heart may be conceived. A ray of light penetrated the rather opaque substance of Herr Ramler's mind, and revealed to him the dangerous character of Lessing. "I know well," he says, "that Herr Lessing means to speak his own opinion, and" — what is the dreadful inference? — "and, by suppressing others, to gain air, and make room for himself. This disposition is not to be over-

come." [1] Fortunately not, for Lessing's opinion always meant something, and was worth having. Gleim no doubt sympathized deeply with the sufferer by this treason, for he too had been shocked at some disrespect for La Fontaine, as a disciple of whom he had announced himself.

Berlin was hardly the place for Lessing, if he could not take a step in any direction without risk of treading on somebody's gouty foot. This was not the last time that he was to have experience of the fact that the critic's pen, the more it has of truth's celestial temper, the more it is apt to reverse the miracle of the archangel's spear, and to bring out whatever is toadlike in the nature of him it touches. We can well understand the sadness with which he said, —

"Der Blick des Forscher's fand
Nicht selten mehr als er zu finden wünschte."

Here, better than anywhere, we may cite something which he wrote of himself to a friend of Klotz. Lessing, it will be remembered, had literally "suppressed" Klotz. "What do you apprehend, then, from me? The more faults and errors you point out to me, so much the more I shall learn of you; the more I learn of you, the more thankful shall I be. . . . I wish you knew me more thoroughly. If the opinion you have of my learning and genius (*Geist*)

[1] "Ramler," writes Georg Forster, "ist die Ziererei, die Eigenliebe, die Eitelkeit in eigener Person."

should perhaps suffer thereby, yet I am sure the idea I should like you to form of my character would gain. I am not the insufferable, unmannerly, proud, slanderous man Herr Klotz proclaims me. It cost me a great deal of trouble and compulsion to be a little bitter against him."[1] Ramler and the rest had contrived a nice little society for mutual admiration, much like that described by Goldsmith, if, indeed, he did not convey it from the French, as was not uncommon with him. "'What, have you never heard of the admirable Brandellius or the ingenious Mogusius, one the eye and the other the heart of our University, known all over the world?' 'Never,' cried the traveller; 'but pray inform me what Brandellius is particularly remarkable for.' 'You must be little acquainted with the republic of letters,' said the other, 'to ask such a question. Brandellius has written a most sublime panegyric on Mogusius.' 'And, prithee, what has Mogusius done to deserve so great a favor?' 'He has written an excellent poem in praise of Brandellius.'"[2] Lessing was not the man who could narrow himself to the proportions of a clique; life long he was the terror of the Brandellii and Mogusii, and, at the signal given by him, —

[1] Lessing to Von Murr, 25th November, 1768. The whole letter is well worth reading..

[2] Review of Dunkins's *Epistle to Lord Chesterfield*.

"They, but now who seemed
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs in narrow room
Throng numberless."

Besides whatever other reasons Lessing may have had for leaving Berlin, I fancy that his having exhausted whatever means it had of helping his spiritual growth was the chief. Nine years later, he gave as a reason for not wishing to stay long in Brunswick, "Not that I do not like Brunswick, but because nothing comes of being long in a place which one likes." [1] Whatever the reason, Lessing, in 1760, left Berlin for Breslau, where the post of secretary had been offered him under Frederick's tough old General Tauentzien. "I will spin myself in for a while like an ugly worm, that I may be able to come to light again as a brilliant winged creature," says his diary. Shortly after his leaving Berlin, he was chosen a member of the Academy of Sciences there. Herr Stahr, who has no little fondness for the foot-light style of phrase, says, "It may easily be imagined that he himself regarded his appointment as an insult rather than as an honor." Lessing himself merely says that it was a matter of indifference to him, which

[1] A favorite phrase of his, which Egbert has preserved for us with its Saxon accent, was *Es kommt doch nischt dabey heraus*, implying that one might do something better for a constancy than shearing swine.

is much more in keeping with his character and with the value of the intended honor.

The Seven Years' War began four years before Lessing took up his abode in Breslau, and it may be asked how he, as a Saxon, was affected by it. I might answer, hardly at all. His position was that of armed neutrality. Long ago at Leipzig he had been accused of Prussian leanings; now in Berlin he was thought too Saxon. Though he disclaimed any such sentiment as patriotism, and called himself a cosmopolite, it is plain enough that his position was simply that of a German. Love of country, except in a very narrow parochial way, was as impossible in Germany then as in America during the Colonial period. Lessing himself, in the latter years of his life, was librarian of one of those petty princelets who sold their subjects to be shot at in America, — creatures strong enough to oppress, too weak to protect their people. Whoever would have found a Germany to love must have pieced it together as painfully as Isis did the scattered bits of Osiris. Yet he says that "the true patriot is by no means extinguished" in him. It was the noisy ones that he could not abide; and, writing to Gleim about his "Grenadier" verses, he advises him to soften the tone of them a little, he himself being a "declared enemy of imprecations," which he would leave altogether to the clergy. I think Herr Stahr

makes too much of these anti-patriot flings of Lessing, which, with a single exception, occur in his letters to Gleim, and with reference to a kind of verse that could not but be distasteful to him, as needing no more brains than a drum, nor other inspiration than serves a trumpet. Lessing undoubtedly had better uses for his breath than to spend it in shouting for either side in this "bloody lawsuit," as he called it, in which he was not concerned. He showed himself German enough, and in the right way, in his persistent warfare against the tyranny of French taste. Goethe long afterwards incurred the same reproach and with as much reason.

He remained in Breslau the better part of five years, studying life in new phases, gathering a library, which, as commonly happens, he afterwards sold at great loss, and writing his "Minna" and his "Laocoön." He accompanied Tauentzien to the siege of Schweidnitz, where Frederick was present in person. He seems to have lived a rather free-and-easy life during his term of office, kept shockingly late hours, and learned, among other things, to gamble, — a fact for which Herr Stahr thinks it needful to account in a high philosophical fashion. I prefer to think that there are *some* motives to which remarkable men are liable in common with the rest of mankind, and that they may occasionally do a thing merely be-

cause it is pleasant, without forethought of medicinal benefit to the mind. Lessing's friends (whose names were *not*, as the reader might be tempted to suppose, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) expected him to make something handsome out of his office; but the pitiful result of those five years of opportunity was nothing more than an immortal book. Unthrifty Lessing, to have been so nice about your fingers (and so near the mint, too), when your general was wise enough to make his fortune! As if ink-stains were the only ones that would wash out, and no others had ever been covered with white kid from the sight of all reasonable men! In July, 1764, he had a violent fever, which he turned to account in his usual cheerful way: "The serious epoch of my life is drawing nigh. I am beginning to become a man, and flatter myself that in this burning fever I have raved away the last remains of my youthful follies. Fortunate illness!" He had never intended to bind himself to an official career. To his father he writes: "I have more than once declared that my present engagement could not continue long, that I have not given up my old plan of living, and that I am more than ever resolved to withdraw from any service that is not wholly to my mind. I have passed the middle of my life, and can think of nothing that could compel me to make myself a slave for the poor

remainder of it. I write you this, dearest father, and must write you this, in order that you may not be astonished if, before long, you should see me once more very far removed from all hopes of, or claims to, a settled prosperity, as it is called." Before the middle of the next year he was back in Berlin again.

There he remained for nearly two years, trying the house-top way of life again, but with indifferent success, as we have reason to think. Indeed, when the metaphor resolves itself into the plain fact of living just on the other side of the roof, — in the garret, namely, — and that from hand to mouth, as was Lessing's case, we need not be surprised to find him gradually beginning to see something more agreeable in a *fixirtes Glück* than he had once been willing to allow. At any rate he was willing, and even heartily desirous, that his friends should succeed in getting for him the place of royal librarian. But Frederick, for some unexplained reason, would not appoint him. Herr Stahr thinks it had something to do with the old "Siècle" manuscript business. But this seems improbable, for Voltaire's wrath was not directed against Lessing; and even if it had been, the great king could hardly have carried the name of an obscure German author in his memory through all those anxious and warlike years. Whatever the cause, Lessing early in 1767 accepts the position of

Theatrical Manager at Hamburg, as usual not too much vexed with disappointment, but quoting gayly —

"Quod non dant proceres, dabit histrio."

Like Burns, he was always "contented wi' little and canty wi' mair." In connection with his place as Manager he was to write a series of dramatic essays and criticisms. It is to this we owe the "Dramaturgie," next to the "Laocoön" the most valuable of his works. But Lessing, though it is plain that he made his hand as light as he could, and wrapped his lash in velvet, soon found that actors had no more taste for truth than authors. He was obliged to drop his remarks on the special merits or demerits of players, and to confine himself to those of the pieces represented. By this his work gained in value; and the latter part of it, written without reference to a particular stage, and devoted to the discussion of those general principles of dramatic art on which he had meditated long and deeply, is far weightier than the rest. There are few men who can put forth all their muscle in a losing race, and it is characteristic of Lessing that what he wrote under the dispiritment of failure should be the most lively and vigorous. Circumstances might be against him, but he was incapable of believing that a cause could be lost which had once enlisted his conviction.

The theatrical enterprise did not prosper long; but Lessing had meanwhile involved himself as partner in a publishing business which harassed him while it lasted, and when it failed, as was inevitable, left him hampered with debt. Help came in his appointment (1770) to take charge of the Duke of Brunswick's library at Wolfenbüttel, with a salary of six hundred thalers a year. This was the more welcome, as he soon after was betrothed with Eva König, widow of a rich manufacturer.[1] Her husband's affairs, however, had been left in confusion, and this, with Lessing's own embarrassments, prevented their being married till October, 1776. Eva König was every way worthy of him. Clever, womanly, discreet, with just enough coyness of the will to be charming when it is joined with sweetness and good sense, she was the true

[1] I find surprisingly little about Lessing in such of the contemporary correspondence of German literary men as I have read. A letter of Boie to Merck (10 April, 1775) gives us a glimpse of him. "Do you know that Lessing will probably marry Reiske's widow and come to Dresden in place of Hagedorn? The restless spirit! How he will get along with the artists, half of them, too, Italians, is to be seen. . . . Liffert and he have met and parted good friends. He has worn ever since on his finger the ring with the skeleton and butterfly which Liffert gave him. He is reported to be much dissatisfied with the theatrical filibustering of Goethe and Lenz, especially with the remarks on the drama in which so little respect is shown for his Aristotle, and the Leipzig folks are said to be greatly rejoiced at getting such an ally."

helpmate of such a man, the serious companion of his mind and the playfellow of his affections. There is something infinitely refreshing to me in the love-letters of these two persons. Without wanting sentiment, there is such a bracing air about them as breathes from the higher levels and strongholds of the soul. They show that self-possession which can alone reserve to love the power of new self-surrender, of never cloying, because never wholly possessed. Here is no invasion and conquest of the weaker nature by the stronger, but an equal league of souls, each in its own realm still sovereign. Turn from such letters as these to those of Saint-Preux and Julie, and you are stifled with the heavy perfume of a demirep's boudoir, — to those of Herder to his Caroline, and you sniff no doubtful odor of professional unction from the sermon-case. Manly old Dr. Johnson, who could be tender and true to a plain woman, knew very well what he meant when he wrote that single poetic sentence of his, — "The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him to be a native of the rocks."

In January, 1778, Lessing's wife died from the effects of a difficult childbirth. The child, a boy, hardly survived its birth. The few words wrung out of Lessing by this double sorrow are to me as deeply moving as anything in tragedy.

"I wished for once to be as happy (*es so gut haben*) as other men. But it has gone ill with me!" "And I was so loath to lose him, this son!" "My wife is dead; and I have had this experience also. I rejoice that I have not many more such experiences left to make, and am quite cheerful." "If you had known her! But they say that to praise one's wife is self-praise. Well, then, I say no more of her! But if you had known her!" *Quite cheerful!* I can recollect nothing more pathetic except Swift's "Only a lock of hair." On the 10th of August he writes to Elise Reimarus, — he is writing to a woman now, an old friend of his and of his wife, and will be less restrained: "I am left here all alone. I have not a single friend to whom I can wholly confide myself. . . . How often must I curse my ever wishing to be for once as happy as other men! How often have I wished myself back again in my old, isolated condition, — to be nothing, to wish nothing, to do nothing, but what the present moment brings with it! . . . Yet I am too proud to think myself unhappy. I just grind my teeth, and let the boat go as pleases wind and waves. Enough that I will not overset it myself." It is plain from this letter that suicide had been in his mind, and with his antique way of thinking on many subjects, he would hardly have looked on it as a crime. But he was too brave a man to

throw up the sponge to fate, and had work to do yet. Within a few days of his wife's death he wrote to Eschenburg: "I am right heartily ashamed if my letter betrayed the least despair. Despair is not nearly so much my failing as levity, which often expresses itself with a little bitterness and misanthropy." A stoic, not from insensibility or cowardice, as so many are, but from stoutness of heart, he blushes at a moment's abdication of self-command. And he will not roil the clear memory of his love with any tinge of the sentimentality so much the fashion, and to be had so cheap, in that generation. There is a moderation of sincerity peculiar to Lessing in the epithet of the following sentence: "How dearly must I pay for the single year I have lived with a *sensible* wife!" "Werther" had then been published four years. Lessing's grief has that pathos which he praised in sculpture, — he may writhe, but he must not scream. Nor is this a new thing with him. On the death of a younger brother, he wrote to his father, fourteen years before: "Why should those who grieve communicate their grief to each other purposely to increase it? . . . Many mourn in death what they loved not living. I will love in life what Nature bids me love, and after death strive to bewail it as little as I can."

I think Herr Stahr is on his stilts again when

he speaks of Lessing's position at Wolfenbüttel. He calls it an "assuming the chains of feudal service, being buried in a corner, a martyrdom that consumed the best powers of his mind and crushed him in body and spirit forever." To crush *forever* is rather a strong phrase, Herr Stahr, to be applied to the spirit, if one must ever give heed to the sense as well as the sound of what one is writing. But eloquence has no bowels for its victims. I have no doubt the Duke of Brunswick meant well by Lessing, and the salary he paid him was as large as he would have got from the frugal Frederick. But one whose trade it was to be a Duke could hardly have had much sympathy with his librarian after he had once found out what he really was. For even if he was not, as Herr Stahr affirms, a republican, and I doubt very much if he was, yet he was not a man who could play with ideas in the light French fashion. At the ardent touch of his sincerity, they took fire, and grew dangerous to what is called the social fabric. The logic of wit, with its momentary flash, is a very different thing from that consequent logic of thought, pushing forward its deliberate sap day and night with a fixed object, which belonged to Lessing. The men who attack abuses are not so much to be dreaded by the reigning house of Superstition as those who, as Dante says, syllogize hateful truths. As for

" the chains of feudal service," they might serve a Fenian Head-Centre on a pinch, but are wholly out of place here. The slavery that Lessing had really taken on him was that of a great library, an Alcina that could always too easily witch him away from the more serious duty of his genius. That a mind like his could be buried in a corner is mere twaddle, and of a kind that has done great wrong to the dignity of letters. Wherever Lessing sat, was the head of the table. That he suffered at Wolfenbüttel is true; but was it nothing to be in love and in debt at the same time, and to feel that his fruition of the one must be postponed for uncertain years by his own folly in incurring the other? If the sparrow-life must end, surely a wee bush is better than nae beild. One cause of Lessing's occasional restlessness and discontent Herr Stahr has failed to notice. It is evident from many passages in his letters that he had his share of the hypochondria which goes with an imaginative temperament. But in him it only serves to bring out in stronger relief his deep-rooted manliness. He spent no breath in that melodious whining which, beginning with Rousseau, has hardly yet gone out of fashion. Work of some kind was his medicine for the blues, — if not always of the kind he would have chosen, then the best that was to be had; since the useful, too, had for him a sweetness of

its own. Sometimes he found a congenial labor in rescuing, as he called it, the memory of some dead scholar or thinker from the wrongs of ignorance or prejudice or falsehood; sometimes in fishing a manuscript out of the ooze of oblivion, and giving it, after a critical cleansing, to the world. Now and then he warmed himself and kept his muscle in trim with buffeting soundly the champions of that shallow artificiality and unctuous wordiness, one of which passed for orthodox in literature, and the other in theology. True religion and creative genius were both so beautiful to him that he could never abide the mediocre counterfeit of either, and he who put so much of his own life into all he wrote could not but hold all scripture sacred in which a divine soul had recorded itself. It would be doing Lessing great wrong to confound his controversial writing with the paltry quarrels of authors. His own personal relations enter into them surprisingly little, for his quarrel was never with men, but with falsehood, cant, and misleading tradition, in whomsoever incarnated. Save for this, they were no longer readable, and might be relegated to that herbarium of Billingsgate gathered by the elder Disraeli.

So far from being "crushed in spirit" at Wolfenbüttel, the years he spent there were among the most productive of his life. "Emilia Galotti," begun in 1758, was finished there and

published in 1771. The controversy with Götze, by far the most important he was engaged in, and the one in which he put forth his maturest powers, was carried on thence. His "Nathan the Wise" (1779), by which almost alone he is known as a poet outside of Germany, was conceived and composed there. The last few years of his life were darkened by ill health and the depression which it brings. His "Nathan" had not the success he hoped. It is sad to see the strong, self-sufficing man casting about for a little sympathy, even for a little praise. "It is really needful to me that you should have some small good opinion of it ["Nathan"], in order to make me once more contented with myself," he writes to Elise Reimarus in May, 1779. That he was weary of polemics, and dissatisfied with himself for letting them distract him from better things, appears from his last pathetic letter to the old friend he loved and valued most,—Mendelssohn. "And in truth, dear friend, I sorely need a letter like yours from time to time, if I am not to become wholly out of humor. I think you do not know me as a man that has a very hot hunger for praise. But the coldness with which the world is wont to convince certain people that they do not suit it, if not deadly, yet stiffens one with chill. I am not astonished that *all* I have written lately does not please *you*. . . . At best, a passage here and there may have

cheated you by recalling our better days. I, too, was then a sound, slim sapling, and am now such a rotten, gnarled trunk!" This was written on the 19th of December, 1780; and on the 15th of February, 1781, Lessing died, not quite fifty-two years old. Goethe was then in his thirty-second year, and Schiller ten years younger.

Of Lessing's relation to metaphysics the reader will find ample discussion in Herr Stahr's volumes. We are not particularly concerned with them, because his interest in such questions was purely speculative, and because he was more concerned to exercise the powers of his mind than to analyze them. His chief business, his master impulse always, was to be a man of letters in the narrower sense of the term. Even into theology he only made occasional raids across the border, as it were, and that not so much with a purpose of reform as in defence of principles which applied equally to the whole domain of thought. He had even less sympathy with heterodoxy than with orthodoxy, and, so far from joining a party or wishing to form one, would have left belief a matter of choice to the individual conscience. "From the bottom of my heart I hate all those people who wish to found sects. For it is not error, but sectarian error, yes, even sectarian truth, that makes men unhappy, or would do so if truth would found a

sect."[1] Again he says, that in his theological controversies he is "much less concerned about theology than about sound common sense, and only therefore prefer the old orthodox (at bottom *tolerant*) theology to the new (at bottom *intolerant*), because the former openly conflicts with sound common sense, while the latter would fain corrupt it. I reconcile myself with my open enemies in order the better to be on my guard against my secret ones."[2] At another time he tells his brother that he has a wholly false notion of his (Lessing's) relation to orthodoxy. "Do you suppose I grudge the world that anybody should seek to enlighten it? — that I do not heartily wish that every one should think rationally about religion? I should loathe myself if even in my scribblings I had any other end than to help forward those great views. But let me choose my own way, which I think best for this purpose. And what is simpler than this way? I would not have the impure water, which has long been unfit to use, preserved; but I would not have it thrown away before we know whence to get purer. . . . Orthodoxy, thank God, we were pretty well done with; a partition-wall had been built between it and Philosophy, behind which each could go her own way without troubling the other. But what are they doing now? They

[1] To his brother Karl, 20th April, 1774.

[2] To the same, 20th March, 1777.

are tearing down this wall, and, under the pretext of making us rational Christians, are making us very irrational philosophers. . . . We are agreed that our old religious system is false; but I cannot say with you that it is a patchwork of bunglers and half-philosophers. I know nothing in the world in which human acuteness has been more displayed or exercised than in that."[1] Lessing was always for freedom, never for looseness, of thought, still less for laxity of principle. But it must be a real freedom, and not that vain struggle to become a majority, which, if it succeed, escapes from heresy only to make heretics of the other side. *Abire ad plures* would with him have meant, not bodily but spiritual death. He did not love the fanaticism of innovation a whit better than that of conservatism. To his sane understanding, both were equally hateful, as different masks of the same selfish bully. Coleridge said that toleration was impossible till indifference made it worthless. Lessing did not wish for toleration, because that implies authority, nor could his earnest temper have conceived of indifference. But he thought it as absurd to regulate opinion as the color of the hair. Here, too, he would have agreed with Selden, that "it is a vain thing to talk of an heretic, for a man for his heart cannot think any otherwise than he does think." Herr Stahr's chapters on this

[1] To his brother Karl, 2d February, 1774.

point, bating a little exaltation of tone, are very satisfactory; though, in his desire to make a leader of Lessing, he almost represents him as being what he shunned, — the founder of a sect. The fact is, that Lessing only formulated in his own way a general movement of thought, and what mainly interests us is that in him we see a layman, alike indifferent to clerisy and heresy, giving energetic and pointed utterance to those opinions of his class which the clergy are content to ignore so long as they remain esoteric. At present the world has advanced to where Lessing stood, while the Church has done its best to stand stock-still; and it would be a curious were it not a melancholy spectacle, to see the indifference with which the laity look on while theologians thrash their wheatless straw, utterly unconscious that there is no longer any common term possible that could bring their creeds again to any point of bearing on the practical life of men. Fielding never made a profounder stroke of satire than in Squire Western's indignant "Art not in the pulpit now! When art got up there, I never mind what dost say."

As an author, Lessing began his career at a period when we cannot say that German literature was at its lowest ebb, only because there had not yet been any flood-tide. That may be said to have begun with him. When we say

German literature, we mean so much of it as has any interest outside of Germany. That part of the literary histories which treats of the dead waste and middle of the eighteenth century reads like a collection of obituaries, and were better reduced to the conciseness of epitaph, though the authors of them seem to find a melancholy pleasure, much like that of undertakers, in the task by which they live. Gottsched reigned supreme on the legitimate throne of dulness. In Switzerland, Bodmer essayed a more republican form of the same authority. At that time a traveller reports eight hundred authors in Zürich alone! Young aspirant for lettered fame, in imagination clear away the lichens from their forgotten headstones, and read humbly the "As I am, so thou must be," on all! Everybody remembers how Goethe, in the seventh book of his autobiography, tells the story of his visit to Gottsched. He enters by mistake an inner room at the moment when a frightened servant brings the discrowned potentate a periwig large enough to reach to the elbows. That awful emblem of pretentious sham seems to be the best type of the literature then predominant. We always fancy it set upon a pole, like Gessler's hat, with nothing in it that was not wooden, for all men to bow down before. The periwig style had its natural place in the age of Louis XIV., and there were certainly brains under it. But it had

run out in France, as the tie-wig style of Pope had in England. In Germany it was the mere imitation of an imitation. Will it be believed that Gottsched recommends his "Art of Poetry" to beginners, in preference to Breitinger's, because it "*will enable them to produce every species of poem in a correct style*, while out of that no one can learn to make an ode or a cantata"? "Whoever," he says, "buys Breitinger's book *in order to learn how to make poems*, will too late regret his money." [1] Gottsched, perhaps, did some service even by his advocacy of French models, by calling attention to the fact that there *was* such a thing as style, and that it was of some consequence. But not one of the authors of that time can be said to survive, nor to be known even by name except to Germans, unless it be Klopstock, Herder, Wieland, and Gellert. And the latter's immortality, such as it is, reminds us somewhat of that Lady Gosling's, whose obituary stated that she was "mentioned by Mrs. Barbauld in her 'Life of Richardson' 'under the name of Miss M., afterwards Lady G.'" Klopstock himself is rather remembered for what he was than what he is, — an immortality of preteriteness; and we much doubt if many Germans put the "Oberon" in their trunks when they start on a journey. Herder alone survives, if not as a contributor to litera-

[1] Gervinus, iv. 62.

ture, strictly so called, yet as a thinker and as part of the intellectual impulse of the day. But at the time, though there were two parties, yet within the lines of each there was a loyal reciprocity of what is called on such occasions appreciation. Wig ducked to wig, each blockhead had a brother, and there was a universal apotheosis of the mediocrity of our set. If the greatest happiness of the greatest number be the true theory, this was all that could be desired. Even Lessing at one time looked up to Hagedorn as the German Horace. If Hagedorn were pleased, what mattered it to Horace? Worse almost than this was the universal pedantry. The solemn bray of one pedagogue was taken up and prolonged in a thousand echoes. There was not only no originality, but no desire for it, — perhaps even a dread of it, as something that would break the *entente cordiale* of placid mutual assurance. No great writer had given that tone of good breeding to the language which would gain it entrance to the society of European literature. No man of genius had made it a necessity of polite culture. It was still as rudely provincial as the Scotch of Allan Ramsay. Frederick the Great was to be forgiven if, with his practical turn, he gave himself wholly to French, which had replaced Latin as a cosmopolitan tongue. It had lightness, ease, fluency, elegance, lucidity — in short, all the good qualities that German lacked.

The study of French models was perhaps the best thing for German literature before it got out of long-clothes. It was bad only when it became a tradition and a tyranny. Lessing did more than any other man to overthrow this foreign usurpation when it had done its work.

The same battle had to be fought on English soil also, and indeed is hardly over yet. For the renewed outbreak of the old quarrel between Classical and Romantic grew out of nothing more than an attempt of the modern spirit to free itself from laws of taste laid down by the *Grand Siècle*. But we must not forget the debt which all modern prose literature owes to France. It is true that Machiavelli was the first to write with classic pith and point in a living language; but he is, for all that, properly an ancient. Montaigne is really the first modern writer, — the first who assimilated his Greek and Latin, and showed that an author might be original and charming, even classical, if he did not try too hard. He is also the first modern critic, and his judgments of the writers of antiquity are those of an equal. He made the ancients his servants, to help him think in Gascon French; and, in spite of his endless quotations, began the crusade against pedantry. It was not, however, till a century later, that the reform became complete in France, and then crossed the Channel. Milton is still a pedant in his prose, and not

seldom even in his great poem. Dryden was the first Englishman who wrote perfectly easy prose, and he owed his style and turn of thought to his French reading. His learning sits easily on him, and has a modern cut. So far, the French influence was one of unmixed good, for it rescued us from pedantry. It must have done something for Germany in the same direction. For its effect on poetry we cannot say as much; and its traditions had themselves become pedantry in another shape when Lessing made an end of it. He himself certainly learned to write prose of Diderot; and whatever Herr Stahr may think of it, his share in the "Letters on German Literature" got its chief inspiration from France.

It is in the "Dramaturgie" that Lessing first properly enters as an influence into European literature. He may be said to have begun the revolt from pseudo-classicism in poetry, and to have been thus unconsciously the founder of romanticism. Wieland's translation of Shakespeare had, it is true, appeared in 1762; but Lessing was the first critic whose profound knowledge of the Greek drama and apprehension of its principles gave weight to his judgment, who recognized in what the true greatness of the poet consisted, and found him to be really nearer the Greeks than any other modern. This was because Lessing looked always more to the life than the form, because he knew the

classics and did not merely cant about them. But if the authority of Lessing, by making people feel easy in their admiration for Shakespeare, perhaps increased the influence of his works, and if his discussions of Aristotle have given a new starting-point to modern criticism, it may be doubted whether the immediate effect on literature of his own critical essays was so great as Herr Stahr supposes. Surely "Götz" and "The Robbers" are nothing like what he would have called Shakespearian, and the whole *Sturm und Drang* tendency would have roused in him nothing but antipathy. Fixed principles in criticism are useful in helping us to form a judgment of works already produced, but it is questionable whether they are not rather a hindrance than a help to living production. Ben Jonson was a fine critic, intimate with the classics as few men have either the leisure or the strength of mind to be in this age of many books, and built regular plays long before they were heard of in France. But he continually trips and falls flat over his metewand of classical propriety, his personages are abstractions, and fortunately neither his precepts nor his practice influenced any one of his greater coevals.[1] In

[1] It should be considered, by those sagacious persons who think that the most marvellous intellect of which we have any record could not master so much Latin and Greek as would serve a sophomore, that Shakespeare must through conversa-

breadth of understanding, and the gravity of purpose that comes of it, he was far above Fletcher or Webster, but how far below either in the subtler, the incalculable, qualities of a dramatic poet! Yet Ben, with his principles off, could soar and sing with the best of them; and there are strains in his lyrics which Herrick, the most Catullian of poets since Catullus, could imitate, but never match. A constant reference to the statutes which taste has codified would only bewilder the creative instinct. Criticism can at best teach writers without genius what is to be avoided or imitated. It cannot communicate life; and its effect, when reduced to rules, has commonly been to produce that correctness which is so praiseworthy and so intolerable. It cannot give taste, it can only demonstrate who has had it. Lessing's essays in this kind were of service to German literature by their manliness of style, whose example was worth a hundred treatises, and by the stimulus there is in all original thinking. Could he have written such a poem as he was capable of conceiving, his influence would have been far greater. It

tion have possessed himself of whatever principles of art Ben Jonson and the other university men had been able to deduce from their study of the classics. That they should not have discussed these matters over their sack at the Mermaid is incredible; that Shakespeare, who left not a drop in any orange he squeezed, could not also have got all the juice out of this one, is even more so.

is the living soul, and not the metaphysical abstraction of it, that is genetic in literature. If to do were as easy as to know what were good to be done! It was out of his own failures to reach the ideal he saw so clearly, that Lessing drew the wisdom which made him so admirable a critic. Even here, too, genius can profit by no experience but its own.

For, in spite of Herr Stahr's protest, we must acknowledge the truth of Lessing's own characteristic confession, that he was no poet. A man of genius he unquestionably was, if genius may be claimed no less for force than fineness of mind, — for the intensity of conviction that inspires the understanding as much as for that apprehension of beauty which gives energy of will to imagination, — but a poetic genius he was not. His mind kindled by friction in the process of thinking, not in the flash of conception, and its delight is in demonstration, not in bodying forth. His prose can leap and run, his verse is always thinking of its feet. Yet in his "Minna" and "Emilia"[1] he shows one

[1] In *Minna* and *Emilia* Lessing followed the lead of Diderot. In the Preface to the second edition of Diderot's *Théâtre*, he says: "I am very conscious that my taste, without Diderot's example and teaching, would have taken quite another direction. Perhaps one more my own, yet hardly one with which my understanding would in the long run have been so well content." Diderot's choice of prose was dictated and justified by the accentual poverty of his mother tongue. Lessing cer-

faculty of the dramatist, that of construction, in a higher degree than any other German.[1] Here his critical deductions served him to some purpose. The action moves rapidly, there is no speechifying, and the parts are coherent. Both plays act better than anything of Goethe or Schiller. But it is the story that interests us, and not the characters. These are not, it is true, the incorporation of certain ideas, or, still worse, of certain dogmas, but they certainly seem some-

tainly revised his judgment on this point (for it was not equally applicable to German) and wrote his maturer *Nathan* in what he took for blank verse. There was much kindred between the minds of the two men. Diderot always seems to me a kind of deboshed Lessing. Lessing was also indebted to Burke, Hume, the two Wartons, and Hurd, among other English writers. Not that he borrowed anything of them but the quickening of his own thought. It should be remembered that Rousseau was seventeen, Diderot and Sterne sixteen, and Winckelmann twelve years older than Lessing. Wieland was four years younger.

[1] Goethe's appreciation of Lessing grew with his years. He writes to Lavater, 18th March, 1781: "Lessing's death has greatly depressed me. I had much pleasure in him and much hope of him." This is a little patronizing in tone. But in the last year of his life, talking with Eckermann, he naturally antedates his admiration, as reminiscence is wont to do: "You can conceive what an effect this piece [*Minna*] had upon us young people. It was, in fact, a shining meteor. It made us aware that something higher existed than anything whereof that feeble literary epoch had a notion. The first two acts are truly a masterpiece of exposition, from which one learned much and can always learn."

thing like machines by which the motive of the play is carried on; and there is nothing of that interplay of plot and character which makes Shakespeare more real in the closet than other dramatists with all the helps of the theatre. It is a striking illustration at once of the futility of mere critical insight and of Lessing's want of imagination, that in the "Emilia" he should have thought a Roman motive consistent with modern habits of thought, and that in "Nathan" he should have been guilty of anachronisms which violate not only the accidental truth of fact, but the essential truth of character. Even if we allowed him imagination, it must be only on the lower plane of prose; for of verse as anything more than so many metrical feet he had not the faintest notion. Of that exquisite sympathy with the movement of the mind, with every swifter or slower pulse of passion, which proves it another species from prose, the very ἀφροδίτη καὶ λύρα of speech, and not merely a higher form of it, he wanted the fineness of sense to conceive. If we compare the prose of Dante or Milton, though both were eloquent, with their verse, we see at once which was the more congenial to them. Lessing has passages of freer and more harmonious utterance in some of his most careless prose essays, than can be found in his "Nathan" from the first line to the last. In the *numeris lege solutis* he is often

snatched beyond himself, and becomes truly dithyrambic; in his pentameters the march of the thought is comparatively hampered and irresolute. His best things are not poetically delicate, but have the tougher fibre of proverbs. Is it not enough, then, to be a great prose-writer? They are as rare as great poets, and if Lessing have the gift to stir and to dilate that something deeper than the mind which genius only can reach, what matter if it be not done to music? Of his minor poems I need say little. Verse was always more or less mechanical with him, and his epigrams are almost all stiff, as if they were bad translations from the Latin. Many of them are shockingly coarse, and in liveliness are on a level with those of our Elizabethan period. Herr Stahr, of course, cannot bear to give them up, even though Gervinus be willing. The prettiest of his shorter poems ("Die Namen") has been appropriated by Coleridge, who has given it a grace which it wants in the original. His "Nathan," by a poor translation of which he is chiefly known to English readers, is an Essay on Toleration in the form of a dialogue. As a play, it has not the interest of "Minna" or "Emilia," though the Germans, who have a praiseworthy national stoicism where one of their great writers is concerned, find in seeing it represented a grave satisfaction, like that of subscribing to a monument. There is a sober

lustre of reflection in it that makes it very good reading; but it wants the molten interfusion of thought and phrase which only imagination can conceive.

As Lessing's mind was continually advancing, always open to new impressions, and capable, as very few are, of apprehending the many-sidedness of truth, as he had the rare quality of being honest with himself, his works seem fragmentary, and give at first an impression of incompleteness. But one learns at length to recognize and value this very incompleteness as characteristic of the man who was growing lifelong, and to whom the selfish thought that any share of truth could be exclusively *his* was an impossibility. At the end of the ninety-fifth number of the "Dramaturgie" he says: "I remind my readers here, that these pages are by no means intended to contain a dramatic system. I am accordingly not bound to solve all the difficulties which I raise. I am quite willing that my thoughts should seem to want connection, — nay, even to contradict each other, — if only there are thoughts in which they [my readers] find material for thinking themselves. I wish to do nothing more than scatter the *fermenta cognitionis*." That is Lessing's great praise, and gives its chief value to his works, a value, indeed, imperishable, and of the noblest kind. No writer can leave a more precious legacy to

posterity than this; and beside this shining merit, all mere literary splendors look pale and cold. There is that life in Lessing's thought which engenders life, and not only thinks for us, but makes us think. Not sceptical, but forever testing and inquiring, it is out of the cloud of his own doubt that the flash comes at last with sudden and vivid illumination. Flashes they indeed are, his finest intuitions, and of very different quality from the equable north-light of the artist. He felt it, and said it of himself, "Ever so many flashes of lightning do not make daylight." We speak now of those more rememberable passages where his highest individuality reveals itself in what may truly be called a passion of thought. In the "Laocoön" there is daylight of the serenest temper, and never was there a better example of the discourse of reason, though even that is also a fragment.

But it is as a nobly original man, even more than as an original thinker, that Lessing is precious to us, and that he is so considerable in German literature. In a higher sense, but in the same kind, he is to Germans what Dr. Johnson is to us, — admirable for what he was. Like Johnson's, too, but still from a loftier plane, a great deal of his thought has a direct bearing on the immediate life and interests of men. His genius was not a St. Elmo's fire, as it so often is with mere poets, — as it was in Shelley, for

example, playing in ineffectual flame about the points of his thought, — but was interfused with his whole nature and made a part of his very being. To the Germans, with their weak nerve of sentimentalism, his brave common sense is a far wholesomer tonic than the cynicism of Heine, which is, after all, only sentimentalism soured. His jealousy for maintaining the just boundaries whether of art or speculation may warn them to check with timely dikes the tendency of their thought to diffuse inundation. Their fondness in æsthetic discussion for a nomenclature subtile enough to split a hair at which even a Thomist would have despaired, is rebuked by the clear simplicity of his style.[1] But he is no exclusive property of Germany. As a complete man, constant, generous, full of honest courage as a hardy follower of Thought wherever she might lead him, above all, as a confessor of that Truth which is forever revealing itself to the seeker, and is the more loved because never wholly revealable, he is an ennobling possession of mankind. Let his own striking words characterize him :—

" Not the truth of which any one is, or supposes himself to be, possessed, but the upright endeavor he has made to arrive at truth, makes the worth of the man. For not by the posses-

[1] Nothing can be droller than the occasional translation by Vischer of a sentence of Lessing into his own jargon.

sion, but by the investigation, of truth are his powers expanded, wherein alone his ever-growing perfection consists. Possession makes us easy, indolent, proud.

"If God held all truth shut in his right hand, and in his left nothing but the ever-restless instinct for truth, though with the condition of forever and ever erring, and should say to me, Choose! I should bow humbly to his left hand, and say, Father, give! pure truth is for Thee alone!"

It is not without reason that fame is awarded only after death. The dust-cloud of notoriety which follows and envelops the men who drive with the wind bewilders contemporary judgment. Lessing, while he lived, had little reward for his labor but the satisfaction inherent in all work faithfully done; the highest, no doubt, of which human nature is capable, and yet perhaps not so sweet as that sympathy of which the world's praise is but an index. But if to perpetuate herself beyond the grave in healthy and ennobling influences be the noblest aspiration of the mind, and its fruition the only reward she would have deemed worthy of herself, then is Lessing to be counted thrice fortunate. Every year since he was laid prematurely in the earth has seen his power for good increase, and made him more precious to the hearts and intellects of men. "Lessing," said Goethe, "would have declined

the lofty title of a Genius; but his enduring influence testifies against himself. On the other hand, we have in literature other and indeed important names of men who, while they lived, were esteemed great geniuses, but whose influence ended with their lives, and who, accordingly, were less than they and others thought. For, as I have said, there is no genius without a productive power that continues forever operative." [1]

[1] Eckermann, *Gespräche mit Goethe*, iii. 229.

ROUSSEAU AND THE SENTIMENTALISTS

ROUSSEAU AND THE SENTIMENTALISTS[1]

1867

WE have had the great professor and founder of the philosophy of Vanity in England. As I had good opportunities of knowing his proceedings almost from day to day, he left no doubt in my mind that he entertained no principle either to influence his heart or to guide his understanding but vanity; with this vice he was possessed to a degree little short of madness. Benevolence to the whole species, and want of feeling for every individual with whom the professors come in contact, form the character of the new philosophy. Setting up for an unsocial independence, this their hero of vanity refuses the just price of common labor, as well as the tribute which opulence owes to genius, and which, when paid, honors the giver and the receiver, and then pleads his beggary as an excuse for his crimes. He melts with tenderness for those only who

[1] *Histoire des Idées Morales et Politiques en France au XVIII^me^ Siècle.* Par M. Jules Barni, Professeur à l'Académie de Genève. Tome ii. Paris. 1867.

touch him by the remotest relation, and then, without one natural pang, casts away, as a sort of offal and excrement, the spawn of his disgustful amours, and sends his children to the hospital of foundlings. The bear loves, licks, and forms her young; but bears are not philosophers."

This was Burke's opinion of the only contemporary who can be said to rival him in fervid and sustained eloquence, to surpass him in grace and persuasiveness of style. Perhaps we should have been more thankful to him if he had left us instead a record of those "proceedings almost from day to day" which he had such "good opportunities of knowing," but it probably never entered his head that posterity might care as much about the doings of the citizen of Geneva as about the sayings of even a British Right Honorable. Vanity eludes recognition by its victims in more shapes, and more pleasing, than any other passion, and perhaps had Mr. Burke been able imaginatively to translate Swiss Jean Jacques into Irish Edmund, he would have found no juster equivalent for the obnoxious trisyllable than "righteous self-esteem." For Burke was himself also, in the subtler sense of the word, a sentimentalist, that is, a man who took what would now be called an æsthetic view of morals and politics. No man who ever wrote English, except perhaps

Mr. Ruskin, more habitually mistook his own personal likes and dislikes, tastes and distastes, for general principles, and this, it may be suspected, is the secret of all merely eloquent writing. He hints at madness as an explanation of Rousseau, and it is curious enough that Mr. Buckle was fain to explain *him* in the same way. It is not, I confess, a solution that we find very satisfactory in this latter case. Burke's fury against the French Revolution was nothing more than was natural to a desperate man in self-defence. It was his own life, or, at least, all that made life dear to him, that was in danger. He had all that abstract political wisdom which may be naturally secreted by a magnanimous nature and a sensitive temperament, absolutely none of that rough-and-tumble kind which is so needful for the conduct of affairs. Fastidiousness is only another form of egotism ; and all men who know not where to look for truth save in the narrow well of self will find their own image at the bottom, and mistake it for what they are seeking. Burke's hatred of Rousseau was genuine and instinctive. It was so genuine and so instinctive as no hatred can be but that of self, of our own weaknesses as we see them in another man. But there was also something deeper in it than this. There was mixed with it the natural dread in the political diviner of the political logician, — in the empirical, of the

theoretic statesman. Burke, confounding the idea of society with the form of it then existing, would have preserved that as the only specific against anarchy. Rousseau, assuming that society as it then existed was but another name for anarchy, would have reconstituted it on an ideal basis. The one has left behind him some of the profoundest aphorisms of political wisdom; the other, some of the clearest principles of political science. The one, clinging to Divine right, found in the fact that things were, a reason that they ought to be; the other, aiming to solve the problem of the Divine order, would deduce from that abstraction alone the claim of anything to be at all. There seems a mere oppugnancy of nature between the two, and yet both were, in different ways, the dupes of their own imaginations.

Now let us hear the opinion of a philosopher who *was* a bear, whether bears be philosophers or not. Boswell had a genuine relish for what was superior in any way, from genius to claret, and of course he did not let Rousseau escape him. "One evening at the Mitre, Johnson said sarcastically to me, 'It seems, sir, you have kept very good company abroad, — Rousseau and Wilkes!' I answered with a smile, 'My dear sir, you don't call Rousseau bad company; do you really think *him* a bad man?' JOHNSON: 'Sir, if you are talking jestingly of this, I don't

talk with you. If you mean to be serious, I think him one of the worst of men, a rascal who ought to be hunted out of society, as he has been. Three or four nations have expelled him, and it is a shame that he is protected in this country. Rousseau, sir, is a very bad man. I would sooner sign a sentence for his transportation, than that of any felon who has gone from the Old Bailey these many years. Yes, I should like to have him work in the plantations.'" *We* were the plantations then, and Rousseau was destined to work there in another and much more wonderful fashion than the gruff old Ursa Major imagined. However, there is always a refreshing heartiness in his growl, a masculine bass with no snarl in it. The Doctor's logic is of that fine old crusted Port sort, the native manufacture of the British conservative mind. Three or four nations *have*, therefore England ought. A few years later, had the Doctor been living, if three or four nations had treated their kings as France did hers, would he have thought the *ergo* a very stringent one for England?

Mr. Burke, who could speak with studied respect of the Prince of Wales, and of his vices with that charity which thinketh no evil and can afford to think no evil of so important a living member of the British Constitution, surely could have had no unmixed moral repugnance for Rousseau's "disgustful amours." It was because

they were *his* that they were so loathsome. Mr. Burke was a snob, though an inspired one. Dr. Johnson, the friend of that wretchedest of lewd fellows, Richard Savage, and of that gay man about town, Topham Beauclerk, — himself sprung from an amour that would have been disgustful had it not been royal, — must also have felt something more in respect of Rousseau than the mere repugnance of virtue for vice. We must sometimes allow to personal temperament its right of peremptory challenge. Johnson had not that fine sensitiveness to the political atmosphere which made Burke presageful of coming tempest, but both of them felt that there was something dangerous in this man. Their dislike has in it somewhat of the energy of fear. Neither of them had the same feeling toward Voltaire, the man of supreme talent, but both felt that what Rousseau was possessed by was genius, with its terrible force either to attract or repel.

> "By the pricking of my thumbs,
> Something wicked this way comes."

Burke and Johnson were both of them sincere men, both of them men of character as well as of intellectual force; and I cite their opinions of Rousseau with the respect due to an honest conviction which has apparent grounds for its adoption, whether we agree with it or no. But it strikes me as a little singular that one whose

life was so full of moral inconsistency, whose character is so contemptible in many ways, in some one might almost say so revolting, should yet have exercised so deep and lasting an influence, and on minds so various, should still be an object of minute and earnest discussion, — that he should have had such vigor in his intellectual loins as to have been the father of Châteaubriand, Byron, Lamartine, George Sand, and many more in literature, in politics of Jefferson and Thomas Paine, — that the spots he had haunted should draw pilgrims so unlike as Gibbon and Napoleon, nay, should draw them still, after the lapse of near a century. Surely there must have been a basis of sincerity in this man seldom matched, if it can prevail against so many reasons for repugnance, aversion, and even disgust. He could not have been the mere sentimentalist and rhetorician for which the rough-and-ready understanding would at first glance be inclined to condemn him. In a certain sense he was both of these, but he was something more. It will bring us a little nearer the point I am aiming at if I quote one other and more recent English opinion of him.

Mr. Thomas Moore, returning pleasantly in a travelling-carriage from a trip to Italy, in which he had never forgotten the poetical shop at home, but had carefully noted down all the pretty images that occurred to him for future

use, — Mr. Thomas Moore, on his way back from a visit to his noble friend Byron, at Venice, who had there been leading a life so gross as to be talked about, even amid the crash of Napoleon's fall, and who was just writing " Don Juan " for the improvement of the world, — Mr. Thomas Moore, fresh from the reading of Byron's " Memoirs," which were so scandalous that, by some hocus-pocus, three thousand guineas afterward found their way into his own pocket for consenting to suppress them, — Mr. Thomas Moore, the *ci-devant* friend of the Prince Regent, and the author of " Little's Poems," among other objects of pilgrimage visits *Les Charmettes*, where Rousseau had lived with Madame de Warens. So good an opportunity for occasional verses was not to be lost, so good a text for a little virtuous moralizing not to be thrown away; and accordingly Mr. Moore pours out several pages of octosyllabic disgust at the sensuality of the dead man of genius. There was no horror for Byron. Toward him all was suavity and decorous *bienséance*. That lively sense of benefits to be received made the Irish Anacreon wink with both his little eyes. In the judgment of a liberal like Mr. Moore, were not the errors of a lord excusable? But with poor Rousseau the case was very different. The son of a watchmaker, an outcast from boyhood up, always on the perilous edge of poverty,

— what right had he to indulge himself in any immoralities? So it is always with the sentimentalists. It is never the thing in itself that is bad or good, but the thing in its relation to some conventional and mostly selfish standard. Moore could be a moralist, in this case, without any trouble, and with the advantage of winning Lord Lansdowne's approval; he could write some graceful verses which everybody would buy, and for the rest it is not hard to be a stoic in eight-syllable measure and in a travelling-carriage. The next dinner at Bowood will taste none the worse. Accordingly he speaks of

> "The mire, the strife
> And vanities of this man's life,
> Who more than all that e'er have glowed
> With fancy's flame (and it was his
> In fullest warmth and radiance) showed
> What an impostor Genius is;
> How, with that strong mimetic art
> Which forms its life and soul, it takes
> All shapes of thought, all hues of heart,
> Nor feels itself one throb it wakes;
> How, like a gem, its light may shine,
> O'er the dark path by mortals trod,
> Itself as mean a worm the while
> As crawls at midnight o'er the sod;
> . . . . . .
> How, with the pencil hardly dry
> From colouring up such scenes of love
> And beauty as make young hearts sigh,
> And dream and think through heaven they rove," etc.

Very spirited, is it not? One has only to overlook a little threadbareness in the similes, and it is very good oratorical verse. But would we believe in it, we must never read Mr. Moore's own journal, and find out how thin a piece of veneering his own life was, — how he lived in sham till his very nature had become subdued to it, till he could persuade himself that a sham could be written into a reality, and actually made experiment thereof in his Diary.

One verse in this diatribe deserves a special comment, —

"What an impostor Genius is!"

In two respects there is nothing to be objected to in it. It is of eight syllables, and "is" rhymes unexceptionably with "his." But is there the least filament of truth in it? I venture to assert, not the least. It was not Rousseau's genius that was an impostor. It was the one thing in him that was always true. We grant that, in allowing that a man has genius. Talent is that which is in a man's power; genius is that in whose power a man is. That is the very difference between them. We might turn the tables on Moore, the man of talent, and say truly enough, What an impostor talent is! Moore talks of the mimetic power with a total misapprehension of what it really is. The mimetic power had nothing whatever to

do with the affair. Rousseau had none of it; Shakespeare had it in excess; but what difference would it make in our judgment of "Hamlet" or "Othello" if a manuscript of Shakespeare's memoirs should turn up, and we should find out that he had been a pitiful fellow? None in the world; for he is not a professed moralist, and his life does not give the warrant to his words. But if Demosthenes, after all his Philippics, throws away his shield and runs, we feel the contemptibleness of the contradiction. With genius itself we never find any fault. It would be an over-nicety that would do that. We do not get invited to nectar and ambrosia so often that we think of grumbling and saying we have better at home. No; the same genius that mastered him who wrote the poem masters us in reading it, and we care for nothing outside the poem itself. How the author lived, what he wore, how he looked, — all that is mere gossip, about which we need not trouble ourselves. Whatever he was or did, somehow or other God let him be worthy to write *this*, and that is enough for us. We forgive everything to the genius; we are inexorable to the man. Shakespeare, Goethe, Burns, — what have their biographies to do with us? Genius is not a question of character. It may be sordid, like the lamp of Aladdin, in its externals; what care we, while the touch of it builds palaces for us,

makes us rich as only men in dream-land are rich, and lords to the utmost bound of imagination? So, when people talk of the ungrateful way in which the world treats its geniuses, they speak unwisely. There is no work of genius which has not been the delight of mankind, no word of genius to which the human heart and soul have not, sooner or later, responded. But the man whom the genius takes possession of for its pen, for its trowel, for its pencil, for its chisel, *him* the world treats according to his deserts. Does Burns drink? It sets him to gauging casks of gin. For, remember, it is not to the practical world that the genius appeals; it *is* the practical world which judges of the man's fitness for its uses, and has a right so to judge. No amount of patronage could have made distilled liquors less toothsome to Robbie Burns, as no amount of them could make a Burns of the Ettrick Shepherd.

There is an old story in the "Gesta Romanorum" of a priest who was found fault with by one of his parishioners because his life was in painful discordance with his teaching. So one day he takes his critic out to a stream, and, giving him to drink of it, asks him if he does not find it sweet and pure water. The parishioner, having answered that it was, is taken to the source, and finds that what had so refreshed him flowed from between the jaws of a dead

dog. "Let this teach thee," said the priest, "that the very best doctrine may take its rise in a very impure and disgustful spring, and that excellent morals may be taught by a man who has no morals at all." It is easy enough to see the fallacy here. Had the man known beforehand from what a carrion fountain-head the stream issued, he could not have drunk of it without loathing. Had the priest merely bidden him to *look* at the stream and see how beautiful it was, instead of tasting it, it would have been quite another matter. And this is precisely the difference between what appeals to our æsthetic or to our moral sense, between what is judged of by the taste or by the conscience.

It is when the sentimentalist turns preacher of morals that we investigate his character, and are justified in so doing. He may express as many and as delicate shades of feeling as he likes, — for this the sensibility of his organization perfectly fits him and no other person could do it so well, — but the moment he undertakes to establish his feeling as a rule of conduct, we ask at once how far are his own life and deed in accordance with what he preaches? For every man feels instinctively that all the beautiful sentiments in the world weigh less than a single lovely action; and that while tenderness of feeling and susceptibility to generous emotions are accidents of temperament, goodness is an

achievement of the will and a quality of the life. Fine words, says our homely old proverb, butter no parsnips; and if the question be how to render those vegetables palatable, an ounce of butter would be worth more than all the orations of Cicero. The only conclusive evidence of a man's sincerity is that he give *himself* for a principle. Words, money, all things else, are comparatively easy to give away; but when a man makes a gift of his daily life and practice, it is plain that the truth, whatever it may be, has taken possession of him. From that sincerity his words gain the force and pertinency of deeds, and his money is no longer the pale drudge 'twixt man and man, but, by a beautiful magic, what erewhile bore the image and superscription of Cæsar seems now to bear the image and superscription of God. It is thus that there is a genius for goodness, for magnanimity, for self-sacrifice, as well as for creative art; and it is thus that by a more refined sort of Platonism the Infinite Beauty dwells in and shapes to its own likeness the soul which gives it body and individuality. But when Moore charges genius with being an impostor, the confusion of his ideas is pitiable. There is nothing so true, so sincere, so downright and forthright, as genius. It is always truer than the man himself is, greater than he. If Shakespeare the man had been as marvellous a creature as the genius

that wrote his plays, that genius so comprehensive in its intelligence, so wise even in its play that its clowns are moralists and philosophers, so penetrative that a single one of its phrases reveals to us the secret of our own character, would his contemporaries have left us so wholly without record of him as they have done, distinguishing him in no wise from his fellow players?

Rousseau, no doubt, was weak, nay, more than that, was sometimes despicable, but yet is not fairly to be reckoned among the herd of sentimentalists. It is shocking that a man whose preaching made it fashionable for women of rank to nurse their children should have sent his own, as soon as born, to the foundling hospital; still more shocking that, in a note to his "Discours sur l'Inégalité," he should speak of this crime as one of the consequences of our social system. But for all that there was a faith and an ardor of conviction in him that distinguish him from most of the writers of his time. Nor were his practice and his preaching always inconsistent. He contrived to pay regularly, whatever his own circumstances were, a pension of one hundred livres a year to a maternal aunt who had been kind to him in childhood. Nor was his asceticism a sham. He might have turned his gift into laced coats and *châteaux* as easily as Voltaire, had he not held it too

sacred to be bartered away in any such losing exchange.

But what is worthy of especial remark is this, — that in nearly all that he wrote his leading object was the good of his kind, and that, through all the vicissitudes of a life which illness, sensibility of temperament, and the approaches of insanity rendered wretched, — the associate of infidels, the foundling child, as it were, of an age without belief, least of all with any belief in itself, — he professed and evidently felt deeply a faith in the goodness both of man and of God. There is no such thing as scoffing in his writings. On the other hand, there is no stereotyped morality. He does not ignore the existence of scepticism ; he recognizes its existence in his own nature, meets it frankly face to face, and makes it confess that there are things in the teaching of Christ that are deeper than its doubt. The influence of his early education at Geneva is apparent here. An intellect so acute as his, trained in the school of Calvin in a republic where theological discussion was as much the amusement of the people as the opera was at Paris, could not fail to be a good logician. He had the fortitude to follow his logic wherever it led him. If the very impressibility of character which quickened his perception of the beauties of Nature, and made him alive to the charm of music and musical expression, pre-

vented him from being in the highest sense an original writer, and if his ideas were mostly suggested to him by books, yet the clearness, consecutiveness, and eloquence with which he stated and enforced them made them his own. There was at least that original fire in him which could fuse them and run them in a novel mould. His power lay in this very ability of manipulating the thoughts of others. Fond of paradox he doubtless was, but he had a way of putting things that arrested attention and excited thought.

It was, perhaps, this very sensibility to the surrounding atmosphere of feeling and speculation, which made Rousseau more directly influential on contemporary thought (or perhaps we should say sentiment) than any writer of his time. And this is rarely consistent with enduring greatness in literature. It forces us to remember, against our will, the oratorical character of his works. They were all pleas, and he a great advocate, with Europe in the jury-box. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm, eloquence produces conviction for the moment, but it is only by truth to nature and the everlasting intuitions of mankind that those abiding influences are won that enlarge from generation to generation. Rousseau was in many respects — as great pleaders always are — a man of the day, who must needs become a mere name to posterity,

yet he could not but have had in him some not inconsiderable share of that principle by which man eternizes himself. For it is only to such that the night cometh not in which no man shall work, and he is still operative both in politics and literature by the principles he formulated or the emotions to which he gave a voice so piercing and so sympathetic.

In judging Rousseau, it would be unfair not to take note of the malarious atmosphere in which he grew up. The constitution of his mind was thus early infected with a feverish taint that made him shiveringly sensitive to a temperature which hardier natures found bracing. To him this rough world was but too literally a rack. Good-humored Mother Nature commonly embeds the nerves of her children in a padding of self-conceit that serves as a buffer against the ordinary shocks to which even a life of routine is liable, and it would seem at first sight as if Rousseau had been better cared for than usual in this regard. But as his self-conceit was enormous, so was the reaction from it proportionate, and the fretting suspiciousness of temper, sure mark of an unsound mind, which rendered him incapable of intimate friendship, while passionately longing for it, became inevitably, when turned inward, a tormenting self-distrust. To dwell in unrealities is the doom of the sentimentalist; but it should not be forgotten that

the same fitful intensity of emotion which makes them real as the means of elation, gives them substance also for torture. Too irritably jealous to endure the rude society of men, he steeped his senses in the enervating incense that women are only too ready to burn. If their friendship be a safeguard to the other sex, their homage is fatal to all but the strongest, and Rousseau was weak both by inheritance and early training. His father was one of those feeble creatures for whom a fine phrase could always satisfactorily fill the void that non-performance leaves behind it. If he neglected duty, he made up for it by that cultivation of the finer sentiments of our common nature which waters flowers of speech with the brineless tears of a flabby remorse, without one fibre of resolve in it, and which impoverishes the character in proportion as it enriches the vocabulary. He was a very Apicius in that digestible kind of woe which makes no man leaner, and had a favorite receipt for cooking you up a sorrow *à la douleur inassouvie* that had just enough delicious sharpness in it to bring tears into the eyes by tickling the palate. "When he said to me, 'Jean Jacques, let us speak of thy mother,' I said to him, 'Well, father, we are going to weep, then,' and this word alone drew tears from him. 'Ah!' said he, groaning, 'give her back to me, console me for her, fill the void she has left in my

soul!'" Alas! in such cases, the void she leaves is only that she found. The grief that seeks any other than its own society will ere long want an object. This admirable parent allowed his son to become an outcast at sixteen, without any attempt to reclaim him, in order to enjoy unmolested a petty inheritance to which the boy was entitled in right of his mother. "This conduct," Rousseau tells us, "of a father whose tenderness and virtue were so well known to me, caused me to make reflections on myself which have not a little contributed to make my heart sound. I drew from it this great maxim of morals, the only one perhaps serviceable in practice, to avoid situations which put our duties in opposition to our interests, and which show us our own advantage in the wrong of another, sure that in such situations, *however sincere may be one's love of virtue*, it sooner or later grows weak without our perceiving it, *and that we become unjust and wicked in action without having ceased to be just and good in soul.*"

This maxim may do for that "fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks its adversary," which Milton could not praise, — that is, for a manhood whose distinction it is not to be manly, — but it is chiefly worth notice as being the characteristic doctrine of sentimentalism. This disjoining of deed from will, of practice from

theory, is to put asunder what God has joined by an indissoluble sacrament. The soul must be tainted before the action become corrupt; and there is no self-delusion more fatal than that which makes the conscience dreamy with the anodyne of lofty sentiments, while the life is grovelling and sensual,—witness Coleridge. In his case we feel something like disgust. But where, as in his son Hartley, there is hereditary infirmity, where the man sees the principle that might rescue him slip from the clutch of a nerveless will, like a rope through the fingers of a drowning man, and the confession of faith is the moan of despair, there is room for no harsher feeling than pity. Rousseau showed through life a singular proneness for being convinced by his own eloquence; he was always his own first convert; and this reconciles his power as a writer with his weakness as a man. He and all like him mistake emotion for conviction, velleity for resolve, the brief eddy of sentiment for the mid-current of ever-gathering faith in duty that draws to itself all the affluents of conscience and will, and gives continuity of purpose to life. They are like men who love the stimulus of being under conviction, as it is called, who, forever getting religion, never get capital enough to retire upon and to spend for their own need and the common service.

The sentimentalist is the spiritual hypochon-

driac, with whom fancies become facts, while facts are a discomfort because they will not be evaporated into fancy. In his eyes, Theory is too fine a dame to confess even a country-cousinship with coarse-handed Practice, whose homely ways would disconcert her artificial world. The very susceptibility that makes him quick to feel, makes him also incapable of deep and durable feeling. He loves to think he suffers, and keeps a pet sorrow, a blue-devil familiar, that goes with him everywhere, like Paracelsus's black dog. He takes good care, however, that it shall not be the true sulphurous article that sometimes takes a fancy to fly away with his conjurer. René says: "In my madness I had gone so far as even to wish I might experience a misfortune, so that my suffering might at least have a real object." But no; selfishness is only active egotism, and there is nothing and nobody, with a single exception, which this sort of creature will not sacrifice, rather than give any other than an imaginary pang to his idol. Vicarious pain he is not unwilling to endure, nay, will even commit suicide by proxy, like the German poet who let his wife kill herself to give him a sensation. Had young Jerusalem been anything like Goethe's portrait of him in "Werther," he would have taken very good care not to blow out the brains which he would have thought only too precious. Real sorrows are uncomfort-

able things, but purely æsthetic ones are by no means unpleasant, and I have always fancied the handsome young Wolfgang writing those distracted letters to Auguste Stolberg with a looking-glass in front of him to give back an image of his desolation, and finding it rather pleasant than otherwise to shed the tear of sympathy with self that would seem so bitter to his fair correspondent. The tears that have real salt in them will keep; they are the difficult, manly tears that are shed in secret; but the pathos soon evaporates from that fresh-water with which a man can bedew a dead donkey in public, while his wife is having a good cry over his neglect of her at home. We do not think the worse of Goethe for hypothetically desolating himself in the fashion aforesaid, for with many constitutions it is as purely natural a crisis as dentition, which the stronger worry through, and turn out very sensible, agreeable fellows. But where there is an arrest of development, and the heartbreak of the patient is audibly prolonged through life, we have a spectacle which the toughest heart would wish to get as far away from as possible.

I would not be supposed to overlook the distinction, too often lost sight of, between sentimentalism and sentiment, the latter being a very excellent thing in its way, as genuine things are apt to be. Sentiment is intellectualized emotion, emotion precipitated, as it were, in pretty crystals

by the fancy. This is the delightful staple of the poets of social life like Horace and Béranger, or Thackeray, when he too rarely played with verse. It puts into words for us that decorous average of feeling to the expression of which society can consent without danger of being indiscreetly moved. It is excellent for people who are willing to save their souls alive to any extent that shall not be discomposing. It is even satisfying till some deeper experience has given us a hunger which what we so glibly call "the world" cannot sate, just as a water-ice is nourishment enough to a man who has had his dinner. It is the sufficing lyrical interpreter of those lighter hours that should make part of every healthy man's day, and is noxious only when it palls men's appetite for the truly profound poetry which is very passion of very soul sobered by afterthought and embodied in eternal types by imagination. True sentiment is emotion ripened by a slow ferment of the mind and qualified to an agreeable temperance by that taste which is the conscience of polite society. But the sentimentalist always insists on taking his emotion neat, and, as his sense gradually deadens to the stimulus, increases his dose till he ends in a kind of moral deliquium. At first the debaucher, he becomes at last the victim of his sensations.

Among the ancients we find little or no trace

of sentimentalism, though Euripides and still more Ovid give hints of it. Their masculine mood both of body and mind left no room for it, and hence the bracing quality of their literature compared with that of recent times, its tonic property, that seems almost too astringent to palates relaxed by a daintier diet. The first great example of the degenerate modern tendency was Petrarch, who may be said to have given it impulse and direction. A more perfect specimen of the type has not since appeared. An intellectual voluptuary, a moral *dilettante*, the first instance of that character, since too common, the gentleman in search of a sensation, seeking a solitude at Vaucluse because it made him more likely to be in demand at Avignon, praising philosophic poverty with a sharp eye to the next rich benefice in the gift of his patron, commending a good life but careful first of a good living, happy only in seclusion but making a dangerous journey to enjoy the theatrical show of a coronation in the Capitol, cherishing a fruitless passion which broke his heart three or four times a year and yet could not make an end of him till he had reached the ripe age of seventy and survived his mistress a quarter of a century, — surely a more exquisite perfection of inconsistency would be hard to find.

When Petrarch returned from his journey into the North of Europe in 1332, he balanced the

books of his unrequited passion, and, finding that he had now been in love seven years, thought the time had at last come to call deliberately on Death. Had Death taken him at his word, he would have protested that he was only in fun. For we find him always taking good care of an excellent constitution, avoiding the plague with commendable assiduity, and in the very year when he declares it absolutely essential to his peace of mind to die for good and all, taking refuge in the fortress of Capranica, from a wholesome dread of having his throat cut by robbers. There is such a difference between dying in a sonnet with a cambric handkerchief at one's eyes, and the prosaic reality of demise certified in the parish register! Practically it is inconvenient to be dead. Among other things, it puts an end to the manufacture of sonnets. But there seems to have been an excellent understanding between Petrarch and Death, for he was brought to that grisly monarch's door so often, that, otherwise, nothing short of a miracle or the nine lives of that animal whom love also makes lyrical could have saved him. "I consent," he cries, "to live and die in Africa among its serpents, upon Caucasus, or Atlas, if, while I live, to breathe a pure air, and after my death a little corner of earth where to bestow my body, may be allowed me. This is all I ask, but this I cannot obtain. Doomed always to wander, and to be a stranger

everywhere, O Fortune, Fortune, fix me at last to some one spot! I do not covet thy favors. Let me enjoy a tranquil poverty, let me pass in this retreat the few days that remain to me!" The pathetic stop of Petrarch's poetical organ was one he could pull out at pleasure, — and indeed we soon learn to distrust literary tears, as the cheap subterfuge for want of real feeling with natures of this quality. Solitude with him was but the pseudonyme of notoriety. Poverty was the archdeaconry of Parma, with other ecclesiastical pickings. During his retreat at Vaucluse, in the very height of that divine sonneteering love of Laura, of that sensitive purity which called Avignon Babylon, and rebuked the sinfulness of Clement, he was himself begetting that kind of children which we spell with a *b*. We believe that, if Messer Francesco had been present when the woman was taken in adultery, he would have flung the first stone without the slightest feeling of inconsistency, nay, with a sublime sense of virtue. The truth is, that it made very little difference to him what sort of proper sentiment he expressed, provided he could do it elegantly and with unction. And with supreme elegance he knew how to express it, thereby conferring an incalculable benefit on the literature of Italy and of Europe.

Would any one feel the difference between his faint abstractions and the Platonism of a power-

ful nature fitted alike for the withdrawal of ideal contemplation and for breasting the storms of life, — would any one know how wide a depth divides a noble friendship based on sympathy of pursuit and aspiration, on that mutual help which souls capable of self-sustainment are the readiest to give or to take, and a simulated passion, true neither to the spiritual nor the sensual part of man, — let him compare the sonnets of Petrarch with those which Michel Angelo addressed to Vittoria Colonna. In them the airiest pinnacles of sentiment and speculation are buttressed with solid mason-work of thought, of an actual, not fancied experience, and the depth of feeling is measured by the sobriety and reserve of expression, while in Petrarch's all ingenuousness is frittered away into ingenuity. Both are cold, but the coldness of the one is self-restraint, while the other chills with pretence of warmth. In Michel Angelo's, you feel the great architect; in Petrarch's the artist who can best realize his conception in the limits of a cherry-stone. And yet this man influenced literature longer and more widely than almost any other in modern times. So great is the charm of elegance, so unreal is the larger part of what is written!

Certainly I do not mean to say that a work of art should be looked at by the light of the artist's biography, or measured by our standard of his character. Nor do I reckon what was

genuine in Petrarch — his love of letters, his refinement, his skill in the superficial graces of language, that rhetorical art by which the music of words supplants their meaning, and the verse moulds the thought instead of being plastic to it — after any such fashion. I have no ambition for that character of *valet de chambre* which is said to disenchant the most heroic figures into mere every-day personages, for it implies a mean soul no less than a servile condition. But we have a right to demand a certain amount of reality, however small, in the emotion of a man who makes it his business to endeavor at exciting our own. We have a privilege of nature to shiver before a painted flame, how cunningly soever the colors be laid on. Yet our love of minute biographical detail, our desire to make ourselves spies upon the men of the past, seems so much of an instinct in us, that we must look for the spring of it in human nature, and that somewhat deeper than mere curiosity or love of gossip. It should seem to arise from what must be considered on the whole a creditable feeling, namely, that we value character more than any amount of talent, — the skill to *be* something, above that of doing anything but the best of its kind. The highest creative genius, and that only, is privileged from arrest by this personality, for there the thing produced is altogether disengaged from the producer. But in natures

incapable of this escape from themselves, the author is inevitably mixed with his work, and we have a feeling that the amount of his sterling character is the security for the notes he issues. Especially we feel so when truth to self, which is always self-forgetful, and not truth to nature, makes an essential part of the value of what is offered us; as where a man undertakes to narrate personal experience or to enforce a dogma. This is particularly true as respects sentimentalists, because of their intrusive self-consciousness; for there is no more universal characteristic of human nature than the instinct of men to apologize to themselves for themselves, and to justify personal failings by generalizing them into universal laws. A man would be the keenest devil's advocate against himself, were it not that he has always taken a retaining-fee for the defence; for I think that the indirect and mostly unconscious pleas in abatement which we read between the lines in the works of many authors are oftener written to set themselves right in their own eyes than in those of the world. And in the real life of the sentimentalist it is the same. He is under the wretched necessity of keeping up, at least in public, the character he has assumed, till he at last reaches that last shift of bankrupt self-respect, to play the hypocrite with himself. Lamartine, after passing round the hat in Europe and America, takes to his bed from

wounded pride when the French Senate votes him a subsidy, and sheds tears of humiliation. Ideally, he resents it; in practical coin, he will accept the shame without a wry face, he will "impeticos the gratillity."

George Sand, speaking of Rousseau's "Confessions," says that an autobiographer always makes himself the hero of his own novel, and cannot help idealizing, even if he would. But the weak point of all sentimentalists is that they always have been, and always continue under every conceivable circumstance to be, their own ideals, whether they are writing their own lives or no. Rousseau opens his book with the statement: "I am not made like any of those I have seen; I venture to believe myself unlike any that exists. If I am not worth more, at least I am different." O exquisite cunning of self-flattery! It is this very imagined difference that makes us worth more in our own foolish sight. For while all men are apt to think, or to persuade themselves that they think, all other men their accomplices in vice or weakness, they are not difficult of belief that they are singular in any quality or talent on which they hug themselves. More than this: people who are truly original are the last to find it out, for the moment we become conscious of a virtue, it has left us or is getting ready to go. Originality does not consist in a fidgety assertion of self-

hood, but in the faculty of getting rid of it altogether, that the truer genius of the man, which commerces with universal nature and with other souls through a common sympathy with that, may take all his powers wholly to itself, — and the truly original man could no more be jealous of his peculiar gift, than the grass could take credit to itself for being green. What is the reason that all children are geniuses (though they contrive so soon to outgrow that dangerous quality), except that they never cross-examine themselves on the subject? The moment that process begins, their speech loses its gift of unexpectedness, and they become as tediously impertinent as the rest of us.

If there never was any one like him, if he constituted a genus in himself, to what end write confessions in which no other human being could ever be in a condition to take the least possible interest? All men are interested in Montaigne in proportion as all men find more of themselves in him, and all men see but one image in the glass which the greatest of poets holds up to Nature, an image which at once startles and charms them with its familiarity. Fabulists always endow their animals with the passions and desires of men. But if an ox could dictate his confessions, what glimmer of understanding should we find in those bovine confidences, unless on some theory of preëxistence,

some blank misgiving of a creature moving about in worlds not realized? The truth is, that we recognize the common humanity of Rousseau in the very weakness that betrayed him into this conceit of himself; we find he is just like the rest of us in this very assumption of essential difference, for among all animals man is the only one who tries to pass for more than he is, and so involves himself in the condemnation of seeming less.

Benvenuto Cellini was right in his *dictum* about autobiographies; and so was Dr. Kitchener in his about hares. First catch your perfectly sincere and unconscious man. He is even more uncommon than a genius of the first order. Most men dress themselves for their autobiographies, as Machiavelli used to do for reading the classics, in their best clothes; they receive us, as it were, in a parlor chilling and awkward from its unfamiliarity with man, and keep us carefully away from the kitchen-chimney-corner, where they would feel at home, and would not look on a lapse into nature as the unpardonable sin. But what do we want of a hospitality that makes strangers of us, or of confidences that keep us at arm's-length? Better the tavern and the newspaper; for in the one we can grumble, and from the other learn more of our neighbors than we care to know. John Smith's autobiography is commonly John Smith's design for an

equestrian statue of himself, — very fine, certainly, and as much like him as like Marcus Aurelius. St. Augustine, kneeling to confess, has an eye to the picturesque, and does it *in pontificalibus*, resolved that Domina Grundy shall think all the better of him. Rousseau cries, "I will bare my heart to you!" and throwing open his waistcoat, makes us the confidants of his dirty linen. Montaigne, indeed, reports of himself with the impartiality of a naturalist, and Boswell, in his letters to Temple, shows a maudlin irretentiveness; but is not old Samuel Pepys, after all, the only man who spoke to himself of himself with perfect simplicity, frankness, and unconsciousness? a creature unique as the dodo, a solitary specimen, to show that it was possible for Nature to indulge in so odd a whimsey! An autobiography is good for nothing, unless the author tell us in it precisely what he meant not to tell. A man who can say what he thinks of another to his face is a disagreeable rarity; but one who could look his own Ego straight in the eye, and pronounce unbiased judgment, were worthy of Sir Thomas Browne's Museum. Had Cheiron written his autobiography, the consciousness of his equine crupper would have ridden him like a nightmare; should a mermaid write hers, she would sink the fish's tail, nor allow it to be put into the scales, in weighing her character. The mermaid, in truth, is the em-

blem of those who strive to see themselves; her mirror is too small to reflect anything more than the *mulier formosa superne*.

But it would be sheer waste of time to hunt Rousseau through all his doublings of inconsistency, and run him to earth in every new paradox. His first two books attacked, one of them literature, and the other society. But this did not prevent him from being diligent with his pen, nor from availing himself of his credit with persons who enjoyed all the advantages of that inequality whose evils he had so pointedly exposed. Indeed, it is curious how little practical communism there has been, how few professors it has had who would not have gained by a general dividend. It is perhaps no frantic effort of generosity in a philosopher with ten crowns in his pocket when he offers to make common stock with a neighbor who has ten thousand of yearly income, nor is it an uncommon thing to see such theories knocked clean out of a man's head by the descent of a thumping legacy. But, consistent or not, Rousseau remains permanently interesting as the highest and most perfect type of the sentimentalist of genius. His was perhaps the acutest mind that was ever mated with an organization so diseased,[1] the brain most far-reaching in speculation that ever kept itself steady and worked out its problems amid such

[1] Perhaps we should except Newton.

disordered tumult of the nerves. His letter to the Archbishop of Paris, admirable for its lucid power and soberness of tone, and his "Rousseau juge de Jean Jacques," which no man can read and believe him to have been sane, show him to us in his strength and weakness, and give us a more charitable, let us hope therefore a truer, notion of him than his own apology for himself. That he was a man of genius appears unmistakably in his impressibility by the deeper meaning of the epoch in which he lived. Before an eruption, clouds steeped through and through with electric life gather over the crater, as if in sympathy and expectation. As the mountain heaves and cracks, these vapory masses are seamed with fire, as if they felt and answered the dumb agony that is struggling for utterance below. Just such flashes of eager sympathetic fire break continually from the cloudy volumes of Rousseau, the result at once and the warning of that convulsion of which Paris was to be the crater and all Europe to feel the spasm. There are symptoms enough elsewhere of that want of faith in the existing order which made the Revolution inevitable, — even so shallow an observer as Horace Walpole could forebode it so early as 1765, — but Rousseau more than all others is the unconscious expression of the groping after something radically new, the instinct for a change that should be organic and

pervade every fibre of the social and political body. Freedom of thought owes far more to the jester Voltaire, who also had his solid kernel of earnest, than to the sombre Genevese, whose earnestness is of the deadly kind. Yet, for good or evil, the latter was the foster-father of modern democracy, and without him our Declaration of Independence would have wanted some of those sentences in which the immemorial longings of the poor and the dreams of solitary enthusiasts were at last affirmed as axioms in the manifesto of a nation, so that all the world might hear.

Though Rousseau, like many other fanatics, had a remarkable vein of common sense in him (witness his remarks on duelling, on landscape-gardening, on French poetry, and much of his thought on education), we cannot trace many practical results to his teaching, least of all in politics. For the great difficulty with his system, if system it may be called, is, that, while it professes to follow Nature, it not only assumes as a starting-point that the individual man may be made over again, but proceeds to the conclusion that man himself, that human nature, must be made over again, and governments remodelled on a purely theoretic basis. But when something like an experiment in this direction was made in 1789, not only did it fail as regarded man in general, but even as regards the particular variety

of man that inhabited France. The Revolution accomplished many changes, and beneficent ones, yet it left France peopled, not by a new race without traditions, but by Frenchmen. Still, there must have been a wonderful force in the words of a man who, above all others, had the secret of making abstractions glow with his own fervor ; and his ideas, dispersed now in the atmosphere of thought, have influenced, perhaps still continue to influence, speculative minds, which prefer swift and sure generalization to hesitating and doubtful experience.

Rousseau has, in one respect, been utterly misrepresented and misunderstood. Even Châteaubriand most unfilially classes him and Voltaire together. It appears to me that the inmost core of his being was religious. Had he remained in the Catholic Church, he might have been a saint. Had he come earlier, he might have founded an order. His was precisely the nature on which religious enthusiasm takes the strongest hold, a temperament which finds sensuous delight in spiritual things, and satisfies its craving for excitement with celestial debauch. He had not the iron temper of a great reformer and organizer like Knox, who, true Scotchman that he was, found a way to weld this world and the other together in a cast-iron creed ; but he had as much as any man ever had that gift of a great preacher to make the oratorical fervor

which persuades himself while it lasts into the abiding conviction of his hearers. That very persuasion of his, that the soul could remain pure while the life was corrupt, is not unexampled among men who have left holier names than he. His "Confessions," also, would assign him to that class with whom the religious sentiment is strong and the moral nature weak. They are apt to believe that they may, as special pleaders say, confess and avoid. Hawthorne has admirably illustrated this in the penance of Mr. Dimmesdale. With all the soil that is upon Rousseau, I cannot help looking on him as one capable beyond any in his generation of being divinely possessed; and if it happened otherwise, when we remember the much that hindered and the little that helped in a life and time like his, we shall be much readier to pity than to condemn. It was his very fitness for being something better that makes him able to shock us so with what in too many respects he unhappily was. Less gifted, he had been less hardly judged. More than any other of the sentimentalists, except possibly Sterne, he had in him a staple of sincerity. Compared with Châteaubriand, he is honesty, compared with Lamartine, he is manliness, itself. His nearest congener in our own tongue is Cowper.

In the whole school there is a sickly taint. The strongest mark which Rousseau has left

upon literature is a sensibility to the picturesque in Nature, not with Nature as a strengthener and consoler, a wholesome tonic for a mind ill at ease with itself, but with Nature as a kind of feminine echo to the mood, flattering it with sympathy rather than correcting it with rebuke or lifting it away from its unmanly depression, as in the wholesomer fellow feeling of Wordsworth. They seek in her an accessory, and not a reproof. It is less a sympathy with Nature than a sympathy with ourselves as we compel her to reflect us. It is solitude, Nature for her estrangement from man, not for her companionship with him ; it is desolation and ruin, Nature as she has triumphed over man, with which this order of mind seeks communion and in which it finds solace. It is with the hostile and destructive power of matter, and not with the spirit of life and renewal that dwells in it, that they ally themselves. And in human character it is the same. Saint-Preux, René, Werther, Manfred, Quasimodo, they are all anomalies, distortions, ruins, — so much easier is it to caricature life from our own sickly conception of it than to paint it in its noble simplicity ; so much cheaper is unreality than truth.

Every man is conscious that he leads two lives, the one trivial and ordinary, the other sacred and recluse ; one which he carries to society and the dinner-table, the other in which his

youth and aspirations survive for him, and which is a confidence between himself and God. Both may be equally sincere, and there need be no contradiction between them, any more than in a healthy man between soul and body. If the higher life be real and earnest, its result, whether in literature or affairs, will be real and earnest too. But no man can produce great things who is not thoroughly sincere in dealing with himself, who would not exchange the finest show for the poorest reality, who does not so love his work that he is not only glad to give himself for it, but finds rather a gain than a sacrifice in the surrender. The sentimentalist does not think of what he does so much as of what the world will think of what he does. He translates should into would, looks upon the spheres of duty and beauty as alien to each other, and can never learn how life rounds itself to a noble completeness between these two opposite but mutually sustaining poles of what we long for and what we must.

Did Rousseau, then, lead a life of this quality? Perhaps, when we consider the contrast which every man who looks backward must feel between the life he planned and the life which circumstance within him and without him has made for him, we should rather ask, Was this the life he meant to lead? Perhaps, when we take into account his faculty of self-deception, — it may

be no greater than our own, — we should ask, Was this the life he believed he led? Have we any right to judge this man after our blunt English fashion, and condemn him, as we are wont to do, on the finding of a jury of average householders? Is French reality precisely our reality? Could we tolerate tragedy in rhymed alexandrines, instead of blank verse? The whole life of Rousseau is pitched on this heroic key, and for the most trivial occasion he must be ready with the sublime sentiments that are supposed to suit him rather than it. It is one of the most curious features of the sentimental ailment, that, while it shuns the contact of men, it courts publicity. In proportion as solitude and communion with self lead the sentimentalist to exaggerate the importance of his own personality, he comes to think that the least event connected with it is of consequence to his fellow men. If he change his shirt, he would have mankind aware of it. Victor Hugo, the greatest living representative of the class, considers it necessary to let the world know by letter from time to time his opinions on every conceivable subject about which it is not asked nor is of the least value unless we concede to him an immediate inspiration. We men of colder blood, in whom self-consciousness takes the form of pride, and who have deified *mauvaise honte* as if our defect were our virtue, find it especially hard to understand that artistic

impulse of more southern races to *pose* themselves properly on every occasion, and not even to die without some tribute of deference to the taste of the world they are leaving. Was not even mighty Cæsar's last thought of his drapery? Let us not condemn Rousseau for what seems to us the indecent exposure of himself in his "Confessions."

Those who allow an oratorical and purely conventional side disconnected with our private understanding of the facts and with life, in which everything has a wholly parliamentary sense where truth is made subservient to the momentary exigencies of eloquence, should be charitable to Rousseau. While we encourage a distinction which establishes two kinds of truth, one for the world and another for the conscience, while we take pleasure in a kind of speech that has no relation to the real thought of speaker or hearer, but to the rostrum only, we must not be hasty to condemn a sentimentalism which we do our best to foster. We listen in public with the gravity of augurs to what we smile at when we meet a brother adept. France is the native land of eulogy, of truth padded out to the size and shape demanded by *comme-il-faut*. The French Academy has, perhaps, done more harm by the vogue it has given to this style, than it has done good by its literary purism ; for the best purity of a language depends on the limpidity of its

source in veracity of thought. Rousseau was in many respects a typical Frenchman, and it is not to be wondered at if he too often fell in with the fashion of saying what was expected of him, and what he thought due to the situation, rather than what would have been true to his inmost consciousness. Perhaps we should allow something to the influence of a Calvinistic training, which certainly helps men who have the least natural tendency towards it to set faith above works, and to persuade themselves of the efficacy of an inward grace to offset an outward and visible defection from it; perhaps something also to the Jewish descent which his name seems to imply.

As the sentimentalist always takes a fanciful, sometimes an unreal, life for an ideal one, it would be too much to say that Rousseau was a man of earnest convictions. But he was a man of fitfully intense ones, as suited so mobile a temperament, and his writings, more than those of any other of his tribe, carry with them that persuasion that was in him while he wrote. In them at least he is as consistent as a man who admits new ideas can ever be. The children of his brain he never abandoned, but clung to them with paternal fidelity. Intellectually he was true and fearless; constitutionally, timid, contradictory, and weak; but never, if I understand him rightly, false. He was a little too credulous of

sonorous sentiment, but he was never, like Châteaubriand or Lamartine, the mere lackey of fine phrases. If, as some fanciful physiologists have assumed, there be a masculine and feminine lobe of the brain, it should seem that in men of sentimental turn the masculine half fell in love with and made an idol of the other, obeying and admiring all the pretty whims of this *folle du logis*. In Rousseau the mistress had some noble elements of character, and less taint of the *demi-monde* than is visible in more recent cases of the same illicit relation.

SPENSER

SPENSER

1875

CHAUCER had been in his grave one hundred and fifty years ere England had secreted choice material enough for the making of another great poet. The nature of men living together in societies, as of the individual man, seems to have its periodic ebbs and floods, its oscillations between the ideal and the matter-of-fact, so that the doubtful boundary line of shore between them is in one generation a hard sandy actuality strewn only with such remembrances of beauty as a dead sea-moss here and there, and in the next is whelmed with those lacelike curves of ever-gaining, ever-receding foam, and that dance of joyous spray which for a moment catches and holds the sunshine.

From the two centuries between 1400 and 1600 the indefatigable Ritson in his "Bibliographia Poetica" has made us a catalogue of some six hundred English poets, or, more properly, verse-makers. Ninety-nine in a hundred of them are mere names, most of them no more than shadows of names, some of them mere initials. Nor can it be said of them that their works have perished because they were written

in an obsolete dialect; for it is the poem that keeps the language alive, and not the language that buoys up the poem. The revival of letters, as it is called, was at first the revival of *ancient* letters, which, while it made men pedants, could do very little towards making them poets, much less towards making them original writers. There was nothing left of the freshness, vivacity, invention, and careless faith in the present which make many of the productions of the Norman Trouvères delightful reading even now. The whole of Europe during the fifteenth century produced no book which has continued readable, or has become in any sense of the word a classic. I do not mean that that century has left us no illustrious names, that it was not enriched with some august intellects who kept alive the apostolic succession of thought and speculation, who passed along the still unextinguished torch of intelligence, the *lampada vitae*, to those who came after them. But a classic is properly a book which maintains itself by virtue of that happy coalescence of matter and style, that innate and exquisite sympathy between the thought that gives life and the form that consents to every mood of grace and dignity, which can be simple without being vulgar, elevated without being distant, and which is something neither ancient nor modern, always new and incapable of growing old. It is not his Latin which makes

Horace cosmopolitan, nor can Béranger's French prevent his becoming so. No hedge of language however thorny, no dragon-coil of centuries, will keep men away from these true apples of the Hesperides if once they have caught sight or scent of them. If poems die, it is because there was never true life in them, that is, that true poetic vitality which no depth of thought, no airiness of fancy, no sincerity of feeling, can singly communicate, but which leaps throbbing at touch of that shaping faculty the imagination. Take Aristotle's ethics, the scholastic philosophy, the theology of Aquinas, the Ptolemaic system of astronomy, the small politics of a provincial city of the Middle Ages, mix in at will Grecian, Roman, and Christian mythology, and tell me what chance there is to make an immortal poem of such an incongruous mixture. Can these dry bones live? Yes, Dante can create such a soul under these ribs of death that one hundred and fifty editions of his poem shall be called for in these last sixty years, the first half of the sixth century since his death. Accordingly I am apt to believe that the complaints one sometimes hears of the neglect of our older literature are the regrets of archæologists rather than of critics. One does not need to advertise the squirrels where the nut-trees are, nor could any amount of lecturing persuade them to spend their teeth on a hollow nut.

On the whole, the Scottish poetry of the fifteenth century has more meat in it than the English, but this is to say very little. Where it is meant to be serious and lofty it falls into the same vices of unreality and allegory which were the fashion of the day, and which there are some patriots so fearfully and wonderfully made as to relish. Stripped of the archaisms (that turn every *y* to a meaningless *z*, spell which *quhilk*, shake *schaik*, bugle *bowgill*, powder *puldir*, and will not let us simply whistle till we have puckered our mouths to *quhissill*) in which the Scottish antiquaries love to keep it disguised, — as if it were nearer to poetry the further it got from all human recognition and sympathy, — stripped of these, there is little to distinguish it from the contemporary verse-mongering south of the Tweed. Their compositions are generally as stiff and artificial as a trellis, in striking contrast with the popular ballad-poetry of Scotland (some of which possibly falls within this period, though most of it is later), which clambers, lawlessly if you will, but at least freely and simply, twining the bare stem of old tradition with graceful sentiment and lively natural sympathies. I find a few sweet and flowing verses in Dunbar's "Merle and Nightingale," — indeed one whole stanza that has always seemed exquisite to me. It is this: —

"Ne'er sweeter noise was heard by living man
Than made this merry, gentle nightingale.
Her sound went with the river as it ran
Out through the fresh and flourished lusty vale;
O merle, quoth she, O fool, leave off thy tale,
For in thy song good teaching there is none,
For both are lost, — the time and the travail
Of every love but upon God alone."

But except this lucky poem, I find little else in the serious verses of Dunbar that does not seem to me tedious and pedantic. I dare say a few more lines might be found scattered here and there, but I hold it a sheer waste of time to hunt after these thin needles of wit buried in unwieldy haystacks of verse. If that be genius, the less we have of it the better. His "Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins," over which the excellent Lord Hailes went into raptures, is wanting in everything but coarseness; and if his invention dance at all, it is like a galley-slave in chains under the lash. It would be well for us if the sins themselves were indeed such wretched bugaboos as he has painted for us. What he means for humor is but the dullest vulgarity; his satire would be Billingsgate if it could, and, failing, becomes a mere offence in the nostrils, for it takes a great deal of salt to keep scurrility sweet. Mr. Sibbald, in his "Chronicle of Scottish Poetry," has admiringly preserved more than enough of it, and seems to find a sort of national savor therein, such as delights his

countrymen in a *haggis*, or the German in his *sauer-kraut*. The uninitiated foreigner puts his handkerchief to his nose, wonders, and gets out of the way as soon as he civilly can. Barbour's "Brus," if not precisely a poem, has passages whose simple tenderness raises them to that level. That on Freedom is familiar.[1] But its highest merit is the natural and unstrained tone of manly courage in it, the easy and familiar way in which Barbour always takes chivalrous conduct as a matter of course, as if heroism were the least you could ask of any man. I modernize a few verses to show what I mean. When the King of England turns to fly from the battle of Bannockburn (and Barbour with his usual generosity tells us he has heard that Sir Aymer de Valence led him away by the bridle-rein against his will), Sir Giles d'Argente

> "Saw the king thus and his menie
> Shape them to flee so speedily,
> He came right to the king in hy [hastily]
> And said, 'Sir, since that is so
> That ye thus gate your gate will go,
> Have ye good-day, for back will I:
> Yet never fled I certainly,
> And I choose here to bide and die
> Than to live shamefully and fly.'"

[1] Though always misapplied in quotation, as if he had used the word in that generalized meaning which is common now, but which could not without an impossible anachronism have been present to his mind. He meant merely freedom from prison.

The "Brus" is in many ways the best rhymed chronicle ever written. It is national in a high and generous way, but I confess I have little faith in that quality in literature which is commonly called nationality, — a kind of praise seldom given where there is anything better to be said. Literature that loses its meaning, or the best part of it, when it gets beyond sight of the parish steeple, is not what I understand by literature. To tell you when you cannot fully taste a book that it is because it is so thoroughly national, is to condemn the book. To say it of a poem is even worse, for it is to say that what should be true of the whole compass of human nature is true only to some north-and-by-east-half-east point of it. I can understand the nationality of Firdusi when, looking sadly back to the former glories of his country, he tells us that "the nightingale still sings old Persian"; I can understand the nationality of Burns when he turns his plough aside to spare the rough burr thistle, and hopes he may write a song or two for dear auld Scotia's sake. That sort of nationality belongs to a country of which we are all citizens, — that country of the heart which has no boundaries laid down on the map. All great poetry must smack of the soil, for it must be rooted in it, must suck life and substance from it, but it must do so with the aspiring instinct of the pine that climbs forever toward

diviner air, and not in the grovelling fashion of the potato. Any verse that makes you and me foreigners is not only not great poetry, but no poetry at all. Dunbar's works were disinterred and edited some thirty years ago by Mr. Laing, and whoso is national enough to like thistles may browse there to his heart's content. I am inclined for other pasture, having long ago satisfied myself by a good deal of dogged reading that every generation is sure of its own share of bores without borrowing from the past.

A little later came Gawain Douglas, whose translation of the Æneid is linguistically valuable, and whose introductions to the seventh and twelfth books — the one describing winter and the other May — have been safely praised, they are so hard to read. There is certainly some poetic feeling in them, and the welcome to the sun comes as near enthusiasm as is possible for a ploughman, with a good steady yoke of oxen, who lays over one furrow of verse, and then turns about to lay the next as cleverly alongside it as he can. But it is a wrong done to good taste to hold up this *item* kind of description any longer as deserving any other credit than that of a good memory. It is a mere bill of parcels, a *post-mortem* inventory of Nature, where imagination is not merely not called for, but would be out of place. Why, a recipe in the cookery-book is as much like a good dinner as

this kind of stuff is like true word-painting. The poet with a real eye in his head does not give us everything, but only the *best* of everything. He selects, he combines, or else he gives what is characteristic only; while the false style of which I have been speaking seems to be as glad to get a pack of impertinences on its shoulders as Christian in the "Pilgrim's Progress" was to be rid of his. One strong verse that can hold itself upright (as the French critic Rivarol said of Dante) with the bare help of the substantive and verb, is worth acres of this dead cord-wood piled stick on stick, a boundless continuity of dryness. I would rather have written that half-stanza of Longfellow's, in the "Wreck of the Hesperus," of the "billow that swept her crew like icicles from her deck," than all Gawain Douglas's tedious enumeration of meteorological phenomena put together. A real landscape is never tiresome; it never presents itself to us as a disjointed succession of isolated particulars; we take it in with one sweep of the eye, — its light, its shadow, its melting gradations of distance: we do not say it is this, it is that, and the other; and we may be sure that if a description in poetry is tiresome there is a grievous mistake somewhere. All the pictorial adjectives in the dictionary will not bring it a hair's breadth nearer to truth and Nature. The fact is that what we see is in the mind to a

greater degree than we are commonly aware. As Coleridge says, —

> "O lady, we receive but what we give,
> And in our life alone doth Nature live!"

I have made the unfortunate Dunbar the text for a diatribe on the subject of descriptive poetry, because I find that this old ghost is not laid yet, but comes back like a vampire to suck the life out of a true enjoyment of poetry, — and the medicine by which vampires were cured was to unbury them, drive a stake through them, and get them under ground again with all despatch. The first duty of the Muse is to be delightful, and it is an injury done to all of us when we are put in the wrong by a kind of statutory affirmation on the part of the critics of something to which our judgment will not consent, and from which our taste revolts. A collection of poets is commonly made up, nine parts in ten, of this perfunctory verse-making, and I never look at one without regretting that we have lost that excellent Latin phrase, *Corpus poetarum*. In fancy I always read it on the backs of the volumes, — a *body* of poets, indeed, with scarce one soul to a hundred of them.

One genuine English poet illustrated the early years of the sixteenth century, — John Skelton. He had vivacity, fancy, humor, and originality. Gleams of the truest poetical sensibility alternate in him with an almost brutal coarseness. He

was truly Rabelaisian before Rabelais. But there is a freedom and hilarity in much of his writing that gives it a singular attraction. A breath of cheerfulness runs along the slender stream of his verse, under which it seems to ripple and crinkle, catching and casting back the sunshine like a stream blown on by clear western winds.

But Skelton was an exceptional blossom of autumn. A long and dreary winter follows. Surrey, who brought back with him from Italy the blank verse not long before introduced by Trissino, is to some extent another exception. He had the sentiment of nature and unhackneyed feeling, but he had no mastery of verse, nor any elegance of diction. We have Gascoigne, Surrey, Wyatt, stiff, pedantic, artificial, systematic as a country cemetery, and, worst of all, the whole time desperately in love. Every verse is as flat, thin, and regular as a lath, and their poems are nothing more than bundles of such tied trimly together. They are said to have refined our language. Let us devoutly hope they did, for it would be pleasant to be grateful to them for something. But I fear it was not so, for only genius can do that; and Sternhold and Hopkins are inspired men in comparison with them. For Sternhold was at least the author of two noble stanzas: —

> "The Lord descended from above
> And bowed the heavens high,

And underneath his feet he cast
The darkness of the sky;

"On cherubs and on cherubims
Full royally he rode,
And on the wings of all the winds
Came flying all abroad."

But Gascoigne and the rest did nothing more than put the worst school of Italian love poetry into an awkward English dress. The Italian proverb says, "Inglese italianizzato, Diavolo incarnato," that an Englishman Italianized is the very devil incarnate, and one feels the truth of it here. The very titles of their poems set one yawning, and their wit is the cause of the dulness that is in other men. "The lover, deceived by his love, repenteth him of the true love he bare her." As thus: —

"Where I sought heaven there found I hap;
From danger unto death,
Much like the mouse that treads the trap
In hope to find her food,
And bites the bread that stops her breath, —
So in like case I stood."

"The lover, accusing his love for her unfaithfulness, proposeth to live in liberty." He says: —

"But I am like the beaten fowl
That from the net escaped,
And thou art like the ravening owl
That all the night hath waked."

And yet at the very time these men were writing there were simple ballad-writers who could have set them an example of simplicity, force, and grandeur. Compare the futile efforts of these poetasters to kindle themselves by a painted flame, and to be pathetic over the lay-figure of a mistress, with the wild vigor and almost fierce sincerity of the "Twa Corbies":—

"As I was walking all alone
I heard twa corbies making a moan.
The one unto the other did say,
Where shall we gang dine to-day?
In beyond that old turf dyke
I wot there lies a new-slain knight;
And naebody kens that he lies there
But his hawk and his hound and his lady fair.
His hound is to the hunting gone,
His hawk to fetch the wild fowl home,
His lady has ta'en another mate,
So we may make our dinner sweet.
O'er his white bones as they lie bare
The wind shall blow forevermair."

There was a lesson in rhetoric for our worthy friends, could they have understood it. But they were as much afraid of an attack of nature as of the plague.

Such was the poetical inheritance of style and diction into which Spenser was born, and which he did more than any one else to redeem from the leaden gripe of vulgar and pedantic conceit. Sir Philip Sidney, born the year after him, with

a keener critical instinct, and a taste earlier emancipated than his own, would have been, had he lived longer, perhaps even more directly influential in educating the taste and refining the vocabulary of his contemporaries and immediate successors. The better of his pastoral poems in the "Arcadia" are, in my judgment, more simple, natural, and, above all, more pathetic than those of Spenser, who sometimes strains the shepherd's pipe with a blast that would better suit the trumpet. Sidney had the good sense to feel that it was unsophisticated sentiment rather than rusticity of phrase that befitted such themes.[1] He recognized the distinction between simplicity and vulgarity, which Wordsworth was so long in finding out, and seems to have divined the fact that there is but one kind of English that is always appropriate and never obsolete, namely, the very best.[2] With the single exception of Thomas Campion, his experiments in adapting classical metres to English verse are more successful than those of his

[1] In his *Defence of Poesy* he condemns the archaisms and provincialisms of the *Shepherd's Calendar*.

[2] "There is, as you must have heard Wordsworth point out, a language of pure, intelligible English, which was spoken in Chaucer's time, and is spoken in ours; equally understood then and now; and of which the Bible is the written and permanent standard, as it has undoubtedly been the great means of preserving it." (*Southey's Life and Correspondence*, iii. 193, 194.)

contemporaries. Some of his elegiacs are not ungrateful to the ear, and it can hardly be doubted that Coleridge borrowed from his eclogue of "Strephon and Klaius" the pleasing movement of his own *Catullian Hendecasyllabics*. Spenser, perhaps out of deference to Sidney, also tried his hand at English hexameters, the introduction of which was claimed by his friend Gabriel Harvey, who thereby conceived that he had assured to himself an immortality of grateful remembrance. But the result was a series of jolts and jars, proving that the language had run off the track. He seems to have been half conscious of it himself, and there is a gleam of mischief in what he writes to Harvey: "I like your late English hexameter so exceedingly well that I also enure my pen sometime in that kind, which I find indeed, as I have often heard you defend in word, neither so hard nor so harsh but that it will easily yield itself to our mother tongue. For the only or chiefest hardness, which seemeth, is in the accent, which sometime gapeth, and, as it were, yawneth ill-favoredly, coming short of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the number, as in *Carpenter;* the middle syllable being used short in speech, when it shall be read long in verse, seemeth like a lame gosling that draweth one leg after her; and *Heaven* being used short as one syllable, when it is in verse stretched out with a diastole,

is like a lame dog that holds up one leg."[1] It is almost inconceivable that Spenser's hexameters should have been written by the man who was so soon to teach his native language how to soar and sing, and to give a fuller sail to English verse.

One of the most striking facts in our literary history is the preëminence at once so frankly and unanimously conceded to Spenser by his contemporaries. At first, it is true, he had not many rivals. Before the "Faery Queen" two long poems were printed and popular, — the "Mirror for Magistrates" and Warner's "Albion's England," — and not long after it came the "Polyolbion" of Drayton and the "Civil Wars" of Daniel. This was the period of the saurians in English poetry, interminable poems, book after book and canto after canto, like far-stretching *vertebrae*, that at first sight would seem to have rendered earth unfit for the habitation of man. They most of them sleep well now, as once they made their readers sleep, and their huge remains lie embedded in the deep

[1] Nash, who has far better claims than Swift to be called the English Rabelais, thus at once describes and parodies Harvey's hexameters in prose, "that drunken, staggering kind of verse, which is all up hill and down hill, like the way betwixt Stamford and Beechfield, and goes like a horse plunging through the mire in the deep of winter, now soused up to the saddle, and straight aloft on his tiptoes." It was a happy thought to satirize (in this inverted way) prose written in the form of verse, for the last twelve words make a hexameter.

morasses of Chalmers and Anderson. We wonder at the length of face and general atrabilious look that mark the portraits of the men of that generation, but it is no marvel when even their relaxations were such downright hard work. Fathers when their day on earth was up must have folded down the leaf and left the task to be finished by their sons, — a dreary inheritance. Yet both Drayton and Daniel are fine poets, though both of them in their most elaborate works made shipwreck of their genius on the shoal of a bad subject. Neither of them could make poetry coalesce with gazetteering or chronicle-making. It was like trying to put a declaration of love into the forms of a declaration in trover. The "Polyolbion" is nothing less than a versified gazetteer of England and Wales, — fortunately Scotland was not yet annexed, or the poem would have been even longer, and already it is the plesiosaurus of verse. Mountains, rivers, and even marshes are personified, to narrate historical episodes, or to give us geographical lectures. There are two fine verses in the seventh book, where, speaking of the cutting down some noble woods, he says, —

"Their trunks like aged folk now bare and naked stand,[1]
As for revenge to heaven each held a withered hand";

and there is a passage about the sea in the twentieth book that comes near being fine; but the

[1] Probably suggested by a verse of Spenser cited *infra*.

far greater part is mere joiner-work. Consider the life of man, that we flee away as a shadow, that our days are as a post, and then think whether we can afford to honor such a draft upon our time as is implied in these thirty books all in alexandrines! Even the laborious Selden, who wrote annotations on it, sometimes more entertaining than the text, gave out at the end of the eighteenth book. Yet Drayton could write well, and had an agreeable lightsomeness of fancy, as his "Nymphidia" proves. His poem "To the Cambrio-Britons on their Harp" is full of vigor; it runs, it leaps, clashing its verses like swords upon bucklers, and moves the pulse to a charge.

Daniel was in all respects a man of finer mould. He did indeed refine our tongue, and deserved the praise his contemporaries concur in giving him of being "well-languaged."[1] Writing two hundred and fifty years ago, he stands in no need of a glossary, and I have noted scarce a dozen words, and not more turns of phrase, in his works, that have become obsolete.

[1] Edmund Bolton in his *Hypercritica* says, "The works of Sam Daniel contained somewhat a flat, but yet withal a very pure and copious English, and words as warrantable as any man's, and *fitter perhaps for prose than measure.*" I have italicized his second thought, which chimes curiously with the feeling Daniel leaves in the mind. (See Haslewood's *Ancient Crit. Essays*, vol. ii.) Wordsworth, an excellent judge, much admired Daniel's poem to the Countess of Cumberland.

This certainly indicates both remarkable taste and equally remarkable judgment. There is a conscious dignity in his thought and sentiment such as we rarely meet. His best poems always remind me of a tableland, where, because all is so level, we are apt to forget on how lofty a plane we are standing. I think his "Musophilus" the best poem of its kind in the language. The reflections are natural, the expression condensed, the thought weighty, and the language worthy of it. But he also wasted himself on an historical poem, in which the characters were incapable of that remoteness from ordinary associations which is essential to the ideal. Not that we can escape into the ideal by *merely* emigrating into the past or the unfamiliar. As in the German legend, the little black Kobold of prose that haunts us in the present will seat himself on the first load of furniture when we undertake our flitting, if the magician be not there to exorcise him. No man can jump off his own shadow, nor, for that matter, off his own age, and it is very likely that Daniel had only the thinking and languaging parts of a poet's outfit, without the higher creative gift which alone can endow his conceptions with enduring life and with an interest which transcends the parish limits of his generation. In the prologue to his "Masque at Court" he has unconsciously defined his own poetry: —

> "Wherein no wild, no rude, no antic sport,
> But tender passions, motions soft and grave,
> The still spectator must expect to have."

And indeed his verse does not snatch you away from ordinary associations and hurry you along with it as is the wont of the higher kinds of poetry, but leaves you, as it were, upon the bank watching the peaceful current and lulled by its somewhat monotonous murmur. His best-known poem, blunderingly misprinted in all the collections, is that addressed to the Countess of Cumberland. It is an amplification of Horace's "Integer Vitae," and when we compare it with the original we miss the point, the compactness, and above all the urbane tone of the original. It is very fine English, but it is the English of diplomacy somehow, and is never downright this or that, but always has the honor to be so or so, with sentiments of the highest consideration. Yet the praise of *well-languaged*, since it implies that good writing then as now demanded choice and forethought, is not without interest for those who would classify the elements of a style that will wear and hold its colors well. His diction, if wanting in the more hardy evidences of muscle, has a suppleness and spring that give proof of training and endurance. His "Defence of Rhyme," written in prose (a more difficult test than verse), has a passionate eloquence that reminds one of Burke, and is

more light-armed and modern than the prose of Milton fifty years later. For us Occidentals he has a kindly prophetic word: —

> "And who in time knows whither we may vent
> The treasure of our tongue? to what strange shores
> The gain of our best glory may be sent
> To enrich unknowing nations with our stores?
> What worlds in the yet unformed Occident
> May come refined with accents that are ours?"

During the period when Spenser was getting his artistic training, a great change was going on in our mother tongue, and the language of literature was disengaging itself more and more from that of ordinary talk. The poets of Italy, Spain, and France began to rain influence and to modify and refine not only style but vocabulary. Men were discovering new worlds in more senses than one, and the visionary finger of expectation still pointed forward. There was, as we learn from contemporary pamphlets, very much the same demand for a national literature that we have heard in America. This demand was nobly answered in the next generation. But no man contributed so much to the transformation of style and language as Spenser; for not only did he deliberately endeavor at reform, but by the charm of his diction, the novel harmonies of his verse, his ideal method of treatment, and the splendor of his fancy, he made the new manner popular and faithful. We can trace in

Spenser's poems the gradual growth of his taste through experiment and failure to that assured self-confidence which indicates that he had at length found out the true bent of his genius, — that happiest of discoveries (and not so easy as it might seem) which puts a man in undisturbed possession of his own individuality. Before his time the boundary between poetry and prose had not been clearly defined. His great merit lies not only in the ideal treatment with which he glorified common things and gilded them with a ray of enthusiasm, but far more in the ideal point of view which he first revealed to his countrymen. He at first sought for that remoteness, which is implied in an escape from the realism of daily life, in the pastoral, — a kind of writing which, oddly enough, from its original intention as a protest in favor of naturalness, and of human as opposed to heroic sentiments, had degenerated into the most artificial of abstractions. But he was soon convinced of his error, and was not long in choosing between an unreality which pretended to be real and those everlasting realities of the mind which seem unreal only because they lie beyond the horizon of the every-day world, and become visible only when the mirage of fantasy lifts them up and hangs them in an ideal atmosphere. As in the old fairy-tales, the task which the age imposes on its poet is to weave its straw

into a golden tissue; and when every device has failed, in comes the witch Imagination, and with a touch the miracle is achieved, simple as miracles always are after they are wrought.

Spenser, like Chaucer a Londoner, was born in 1553.[1] Nothing is known of his parents, except that the name of his mother was Elizabeth; but he was of gentle birth, as he more than once informs us, with the natural satisfaction of a poor man of genius at a time when the business talent of the middle class was opening to it the door of prosperous preferment. In 1569 he was entered as a sizar at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, and in due course took his bachelor's degree in 1573, and his master's in 1576. He is supposed, on insufficient grounds, as it appears to me, to have met with some disgust or disappointment during his residence at the University.[2] Between 1576 and 1578 Spenser

[1] Mr. Hales, in the excellent memoir of the poet prefixed to the Globe edition of his works, puts his birth a year earlier, on the strength of a line in the sixtieth sonnet. But it is not established that this sonnet was written in 1593, and even if it were, a sonnet is not upon oath, and the poet would prefer the round number forty, which suited the measure of his verse, to thirty-nine or forty-one, which might have been truer to the measure of his days.

[2] This has been inferred from a passage in one of Gabriel Harvey's letters to him. But it would seem more natural, from the many allusions in Harvey's pamphlets against Nash, that it was his own wrongs which he had in mind, and his

seems to have been with some of his kinsfolk "in the North." It was during this interval that he conceived his fruitless passion for the Rosalinde, whose jilting him for another shepherd, whom he calls Menalcas, is somewhat perfunctorily bemoaned in his pastorals.[1] Before the publication of his "Shepherd's Calendar" in 1579, he had made the acquaintance of Sir Philip Sidney, and was domiciled with him for a time at Penshurst, whether as guest or literary

self-absorption would take it for granted that Spenser sympathized with him in all his grudges. Harvey is a remarkable instance of the refining influence of classical studies. Amid the pedantic farrago of his omni-sufficiency (to borrow one of his own words) we come suddenly upon passages whose gravity of sentiment, stateliness of movement, and purity of diction remind us of Landor. These lucid intervals in his overweening vanity explain and justify the friendship of Spenser. Yet the reiteration of emphasis with which he insists on all the world's knowing that Nash had called him an ass, probably gave Shakespeare the hint for one of the most comic touches in the character of Dogberry.

[1] The late Major C. G. Halpine, in a very interesting essay, makes it extremely probable that Rosalinde is the anagram of Rose Daniel, sister of the poet, and married to John Florio. He leaves little doubt, also, that the name of Spenser's wife (hitherto unknown) was Elizabeth Nagle. (See *Atlantic Monthly*, vol. ii. 674, November, 1858.) Mr. Halpine informed me that he found the substance of his essay among the papers of his father, the late Rev. N. J. Halpine, of Dublin. The latter published in the series of the Shakespeare Society a sprightly little tract entitled *Oberon*, which, if not quite convincing, is well worth reading for its ingenuity and research.

dependant is uncertain. In October, 1579, he is in the household of the Earl of Leicester. In July, 1580, he accompanied Lord Grey de Wilton to Ireland as Secretary, and in that country he spent the rest of his life, with occasional flying visits to England to publish poems or in search of preferment. His residence in that country has been compared to that of Ovid in Pontus. And, no doubt, there were certain outward points of likeness. The Irishry by whom he was surrounded were to the full as savage, as hostile, and as tenacious of their ancestral habitudes as the Scythians [1] who made Tomi a prison, and the descendants of the earlier English settlers had degenerated as much as the Mix-Hellenes who disgusted the Latin poet. Spenser himself looked on his life in Ireland as a banishment. In his "Colin Clout's Come Home Again" he tells us that Sir Walter Raleigh, who visited him in 1589, and heard what was then finished of the "Faery Queen," —

> "'Gan to cast great liking to my lore
> And great disliking to my luckless lot,
> That banisht had myself, like wight forlore,
> Into that waste, where I was quite forgot.
> The which to leave thenceforth he counselled me,
> Unmeet for man in whom was aught regardful,
> And wend with him his Cynthia to see,
> Whose grace was great and bounty most rewardful."

[1] In his prose tract on Ireland, Spenser, perhaps with some memory of Ovid in his mind, derives the Irish mainly from the Scythians.

But Spenser was already living at Kilcolman Castle (which, with 3028 acres of land from the forfeited estates of the Earl of Desmond, was confirmed to him by grant two years later), amid scenery at once placid and noble, whose varied charm he felt profoundly. He could not complain, with Ovid, —

"Non liber hic ullus, non qui mihi commodet aurem,"—

for he was within reach of a cultivated society, which gave him the stimulus of hearty admiration both as poet and scholar. Above all, he was fortunate in a seclusion that prompted study and deepened meditation, while it enabled him to converse with his genius disengaged from those worldly influences which would have disenchanted it of its mystic enthusiasm, if they did not muddle it ingloriously away. Surely this sequestered nest was more congenial to the brooding of those ethereal visions of the "Faery Queen" and to giving his "soul a loose" than

> "The smoke, the wealth, and noise of Rome,
> And all the busy pageantry
> That wise men scorn and fools adore."

Yet he longed for London, if not with the homesickness of Bussy-Rabutin in exile from the Parisian sun, yet enough to make him joyfully accompany Raleigh thither in the early winter of 1589, carrying with him the first three books of the great poem begun ten years be-

fore. Horace's *nonum prematur in annum* had been more than complied with, and the success was answerable to the well-seasoned material and conscientious faithfulness of the work. But Spenser did not stay long in London to enjoy his fame. Seen close at hand, with its jealousies, intrigues, and selfish basenesses, the court had lost the enchantment lent by the distance of Kilcolman. A nature so prone to ideal contemplation as Spenser's would be profoundly shocked by seeing too closely the ignoble springs of contemporaneous policy, and learning by what paltry personal motives the noble opportunities of the world are at any given moment endangered. It is a sad discovery that history is so mainly made by ignoble men.

> "Vide questo globo
> Tal ch' ei sorrise del suo vil sembiante."

In his "Colin Clout," written just after his return to Ireland, he speaks of the court in a tone of contemptuous bitterness, in which, as it seems to me, there is more of the sorrow of disillusion than of the gall of personal disappointment. He speaks, so he tells us, —

> "To warn young shepherds' wandering wit
> Which, through report of that life's painted bliss,
> Abandon quiet home to seek for it
> And leave their lambs to loss misled amiss;
> For, sooth to say, it is no sort of life
> For shepherd fit to live in that same place,

Where each one seeks with malice and with strife
To thrust down other into foul disgrace
Himself to raise; and he doth soonest rise
That best can handle his deceitful wit
In subtle shifts . . .
To which him needs a guileful hollow heart
Maskëd with fair dissembling courtesy,
A filëd tongue furnisht with terms of art,
No art of school, but courtiers' schoolery.
For arts of school have there small countenance,
Counted but toys to busy idle brains,
And there professors find small maintenance,
But to be instruments of others' gains,
Nor is there place for any gentle wit
Unless to please it can itself apply.

. . . . . .

Even such is all their vaunted vanity,
Naught else but smoke that passeth soon away.

. . . . . .

So they themselves for praise of fools do sell,
And all their wealth for painting on a wall.

. . . . . .

Whiles single Truth and simple Honesty
Do wander up and down despised of all." [1]

And again in his "Mother Hubberd's Tale," in the most pithy and masculine verses he ever wrote: —

"Most miserable man, whom wicked Fate
Hath brought to Court to sue for *Had-I-wist*
That few have found and many one hath mist!
Full little knowest thou that hast not tried
What hell it is in suing long to bide;

[1] Compare Shakespeare's Sonnet LXVI.

To lose good days that might be better spent,
To waste long nights in pensive discontent,
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow,
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow,
To have thy prince's grace yet want her Peers',
To have thy asking yet wait many years,
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares,
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs,
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

. . . . . .

Whoever leaves sweet home, where mean estate
In safe assurance, without strife or hate,
Finds all things needful for contentment meek,
And will to court for shadows vain to seek,

. . . . . .

That curse God send unto mine enemy!" [1]

When Spenser had once got safely back to the secure retreat and serene companionship of his great poem, with what profound and pathetic exultation must he have recalled the verses of Dante!

"Chi dietro a jura, e chi ad aforismi
Sen giva, e chi seguendo sacerdozio,
E chi regnar per forza o per sofismi,

[1] This poem, published in 1591, was, Spenser tells us in his dedication, "long sithens composed in the raw conceit of my youth." But he had evidently retouched it. The verses quoted show a firmer hand than is generally seen in it, and we are safe in assuming that they were added after his visit to England. Dr. Johnson epigrammatized Spenser's indictment into

"There mark what ills the scholar's life assail,
Toil, envy, want, the patron, and the jail,"—

but I think it loses in pathos more than it gains in point.

E chi rubare, e chi civil negozio,
Chi nei diletti della carne involto
S' affaticava, e chi si dava all' ozio,
Quando da tutte queste cose sciolto,
Con Beatrice m' era suso in cielo
Cotanto gloriosamente accolto." [1]

What Spenser says of the indifference of the court to learning and literature is the more remarkable because he himself was by no means an unsuccessful suitor. Queen Elizabeth bestowed on him a pension of fifty pounds, and shortly after he received the grant of lands already mentioned. It is said, indeed, that Lord Burleigh in some way hindered the advancement of the poet, who more than once directly alludes to him either in reproach or remonstrance. In "The Ruins of Time," after speaking of the death of Walsingham, —

"Since whose decease learning lies unregarded,
And men of armes do wander unrewarded," —

he gives the following reason for their neglect: —

"For he that now wields all things at his will,
Scorns th' one and th' other in his deeper skill.
O grief of griefs! O gall of all good hearts,
To see that virtue should despisëd be
Of him that first was raised for virtuous parts,
And now, broad-spreading like an aged tree,
Lets none shoot up that nigh him planted be:

[1] *Paradiso*, XI. 4–12. Spenser was familiar with the *Divina Commedia*, though I do not remember that his commentators have pointed out his chief obligations to it.

O let the man of whom the Muse is scorned
Nor live nor dead be of the Muse adorned!"

And in the introduction to the fourth book of the "Faery Queen," he says again:—

"The rugged forehead that with grave foresight
Wields kingdoms' causes and affairs of state,
My looser rhymes, I wot, doth sharply wite
For praising Love, as I have done of late,—
. . . . . .
By which frail youth is oft to folly led
Through false allurement of that pleasing bait,
That better were in virtues discipled
Than with vain poems' weeds to have their fancies fed.

"Such ones ill judge of love that cannot love
Nor in their frozen hearts feel kindly flame;
Forthy they ought not thing unknown reprove,
Ne natural affection faultless blame
For fault of few that have abused the same:
For it of honor and all virtue is
The root, and brings forth glorious flowers of fame
That crown true lovers with immortal bliss,
The meed of them that love and do not live amiss."

If Lord Burleigh could not relish such a dish of nightingales' tongues as the "Faery Queen," he is very much more to be pitied than Spenser. The sensitive purity of the poet might indeed well be wounded when a poem in which he proposed to himself "to discourse at large," of "the ethick part of Moral Philosophy"[1] could

[1] His own words as reported by Lodowick Bryskett. (Todd's *Spenser*, I. lx.) The whole passage is very inter-

be so misinterpreted. But Spenser speaks in the same strain and without any other than a general application in his "Tears of the Muses," and his friend Sidney undertakes the defence of poesy because it was undervalued. But undervalued by whom? By the only persons about whom he knew or cared anything, those whom we should now call Society and who were then called the Court. The inference I would draw is that, among the causes which contributed to the marvellous efflorescence of genius in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the influence of direct patronage from above is to be reckoned at almost nothing.[1] Then, as when the same phenomenon has happened elsewhere, there must have been a sympathetic public. Literature, properly so called,

esting as giving us the only glimpse we get of the living Spenser in actual contact with his fellow men. It shows him to us, as we could wish to see him, surrounded with loving respect, companionable and helpful. Bryskett tells us that he was "perfect in the Greek tongue," and "also very well read in philosophy both moral and natural." He encouraged Bryskett in the study of Greek, and offered to help him in it. Comparing the last verse of the above citation of the *Faery Queen* with other passages in Spenser, I cannot help thinking that he wrote, "do not love amiss."

[1] "And know, sweet prince, when you shall come to know,
That 't is not in the power of kings to raise
A spirit for verse that is not born thereto;
Nor are they born in every prince's days."
Daniel's Dedic. Trag. of *Philotas*.

draws its sap from the deep soil of human nature's common and everlasting sympathies, the gathered leaf-mould of countless generations (οἵη περ φύλλων γενεή), and not from any top-dressing capriciously scattered over the surface at some master's bidding.[1] England had long been growing more truly insular in language and political ideas when the Reformation came to precipitate her national consciousness by secluding her more completely from the rest of Europe. Hitherto there had been Englishmen of a distinct type enough, honestly hating foreigners, and reigned over by kings of whom they were proud or not as the case might be, but there was no England as a separate entity from the sovereign who embodied it for the time being.[2] But now an English people began

[1] Louis XIV. is commonly supposed in some miraculous way to have created French literature. He may more truly be said to have petrified it so far as his influence went. The French *renaissance* in the preceding century was produced by causes similar in essentials to those which brought about that in England not long after. The *grand siècle* grew by natural processes of development out of that which had preceded it, and which, to the impartial foreigner at least, has more flavor, and more French flavor too, than the Gallo-Roman usurper that pushed it from its stool. The best modern French poetry has been forced to temper its verses in the colder natural springs of the ante-classic period.

[2] In the Elizabethan drama, the words "England" and "France" are constantly used to signify the kings of those countries.

to be dimly aware of itself. Their having got a religion to themselves must have intensified them much as the having a god of their own did the Jews. The exhilaration of relief after the long tension of anxiety, when the Spanish Armada was overwhelmed like the hosts of Pharaoh, while it confirmed their assurance of a provincial deity, must also have been like sunshine to bring into flower all that there was of imaginative or sentimental in the English nature, already just in the first flush of its spring.

(" The yongë sonne
Had in *the Bull* half of his course yronne.")

And just at this moment of blossoming every breeze was dusty with the golden pollen of Greece, Rome, and Italy. If Keats could say, when he first opened Chapman's Homer, —

" Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise,"—

if Keats could say this, whose mind had been unconsciously fed with the results of this culture, — results that permeated all thought, all literature, and all talk, — fancy what must have been the awakening shock and impulse communicated to men's brains by the revelation of this new world of thought and fancy, an

unveiling gradual yet sudden, like that of a great organ, which discovered to them what a wondrous instrument was in the soul of man with its epic and lyric stops, its deep thunders of tragedy and its passionate *vox humana!* It might almost seem as if Shakespeare had typified all this in Miranda, when she cries out at first sight of the king and his courtiers, —

> "O, wonder!
> How many goodly creatures are there here!
> How beauteous mankind is! O, brave new world
> That hath such people in 't!"

The civil wars of the Roses had been a barren period in English literature, because they had been merely dynastic squabbles, in which no great principles were involved which could shake all minds with controversy and heat them to intense conviction. A conflict of opposing ambitions wears out the moral no less than the material forces of a people, but the ferment of hostile ideas and convictions may realize resources of character which before were only potential, may transform a merely gregarious multitude into a nation proud in its strength, sensible of the dignity and duty which strength involves, and groping after a common ideal. Some such transformation had been wrought or was going on in England. For the first time a distinct image of her was disengaging itself from the tangled blur of tradition and association in the minds

of her children, and it was now only that her great poet could speak exultingly to an audience that would understand him with a passionate sympathy, of

> "This happy breed of men, this little world,
> This precious stone set in a silver sea,
> This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
> This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
> England, bound in with the triumphant sea!"

Such a period can hardly recur again, but something like it, something pointing back to similar producing causes, is observable in the revival of English imaginative literature at the close of the last and in the early years of the present century. Again, after long fermentation, there was a war of principles, again the national consciousness was heightened and stung by a danger to the national existence, and again there was a crop of great poets and heroic men.

Spenser once more visited England, bringing with him three more books of the "Faery Queen," in 1595. He is supposed to have remained there during the two following years.[1]

[1] I say supposed, for the names of his two sons, Sylvanus and Peregrine, indicate that they were born in Ireland, and that Spenser continued to regard it as a wilderness and his abode there as exile. The two other children are added on the authority of a pedigree drawn up by Sir W. Betham and cited in Mr. Hales's *Life of Spenser* prefixed to the Globe edition.

In 1594 he had been married to the lady celebrated in his somewhat artificial *amoretti*. By her he had four children. He was now at the height of his felicity; by universal acclaim the first poet of his age, and the one obstacle to his material advancement (if obstacle it was) had been put out of the way by the death of Lord Burleigh, August, 1598. In the next month he was recommended in a letter from Queen Elizabeth for the shrievalty of the county of Cork. But alas for Polycrates! In October the wild kerns and gallowglasses rose in no mood for sparing the house of Pindarus. They sacked and burned his castle, from which he with his wife and children barely escaped.[1] He sought

[1] Ben Jonson told Drummond that one child perished in the flames. But he was speaking after an interval of twenty-one years, and, of course, from hearsay. Spenser's misery was exaggerated by succeeding poets, who used him to point a moral, and from the shelter of his tomb launched many a shaft of sarcasm at an unappreciative public. Phineas Fletcher in his *Purple Island* (a poem which reminds us of the *Faery Queen* by the supreme tediousness of its allegory, but in nothing else) set the example in the best verse he ever wrote: —

"Poorly, poor man, he lived; poorly, poor man, he died."

Gradually this poetical tradition established itself firmly as authentic history. Spenser could never have been poor, except by comparison. The whole story of his later days has a strong savor of legend. He must have had ample warning of Tyrone's rebellion, and would probably have sent away his wife and children to Cork, if he did not go thither himself.

shelter in London, and died there on the 16th January, 1599, at a tavern in King Street, Westminster. He was buried in the neighboring Abbey, next to Chaucer, at the cost of the Earl of Essex, poets bearing his pall and casting verses into his grave. He died poor, but not in want. On the whole, his life may be reckoned a happy one, as in the main the lives of the great poets must have commonly been. If they feel more passionately the pang of the moment, so also the compensations are incalculable, and not the least of them this very capacity of passionate emotion. The real good fortune is to be measured, not by more or less of outward prosperity, but by the opportunity given for the development and free play of the genius. It should be remembered that the power of expression which exaggerates their griefs is also no inconsiderable consolation for them. We should measure what Spenser says of his worldly disappointments by the bitterness of the unavailing tears he shed for

I am inclined to think that he did, carrying his papers with him, and among them the two cantos of *Mutability*, first published in 1611. These, it is most likely, were the only ones he ever completed, for, with all his abundance, he was evidently a laborious finisher. When we remember that ten years were given to the elaboration of the first three books, and that five more elapsed before the next three were ready, we shall waste no vain regrets on the six concluding books supposed to have been lost by the carelessness of an imaginary servant on their way from Ireland.

Rosalinde. A careful analysis of these leaves no perceptible residuum of salt, and we are tempted to believe that the passion itself was not much more real than the pastoral accessories of pipe and crook. I very much doubt whether Spenser ever felt more than one profound passion in his life, and that luckily was for his "Faery Queen." He was fortunate in the friendship of the best men and women of his time, in the seclusion which made him free of the still better society of the past, in the loving recognition of his countrymen. All that we know of him is amiable and of good report. He was faithful to the friendships of his youth, pure in his loves, unspotted in his life. Above all, the ideal with him was not a thing apart and unattainable, but the sweetener and ennobler of the street and the fireside.

There are two ways of measuring a poet, either by an absolute æsthetic standard, or relatively to his position in the literary history of his country and the conditions of his generation. Both should be borne in mind as coefficients in a perfectly fair judgment. If his positive merit is to be settled irrevocably by the former, yet an intelligent criticism will find its advantage not only in considering what he was, but what, under the given circumstances, it was possible for him to be.

The fact that the great poem of Spenser was

inspired by the "Orlando" of Ariosto, and written in avowed emulation of it, and that the poet almost always needs to have his fancy set agoing by the hint of some predecessor, must not lead us to overlook his manifest claim to originality. It is not what a poet takes, but what he makes out of what he has taken, that shows what native force is in him. Above all, did his mind dwell complacently in those forms and fashions which in their very birth are already obsolescent, or was it instinctively drawn to those qualities which are permanent in language and whatever is wrought in it? There is much in Spenser that is contemporary and evanescent; but the substance of him is durable, and his work was the deliberate result of intelligent purpose and ample culture. The publication of his "Shepherd's Calendar" in 1579 (though the poem itself be of little interest) is one of the epochs in our literature. Spenser had at least the originality to see clearly and to feel keenly that it was essential to bring poetry back again to some kind of understanding with Nature. His immediate predecessors seem to have conceived of it as a kind of bird of paradise, born to float somewhere between heaven and earth, with no very well defined relation to either. It is true that the nearest approach they were able to make to this airy ideal was a shuttlecock, winged with a bright plume or so from Italy, but, after all,

nothing but cork and feathers, which they bandied back and forth from one stanza to another, with the useful ambition of *keeping it up* as long as they could. To my mind the old comedy of "Gammer Gurton's Needle" is worth the whole of them. It may be coarse, earthy, but in reading it one feels that he is at least a man among men, and not a humbug among humbugs.

The form of Spenser's "Shepherd's Calendar," it is true, is artificial, absurdly so if you look at it merely from the outside, — not, perhaps, the wisest way to look at anything, unless it be a jail or a volume of the "Congressional Globe," — but the spirit of it is fresh and original. We have at last got over the superstition that shepherds and shepherdesses are any wiser or simpler than other people. We know that wisdom can be won only by wide commerce with men and books, and that simplicity, whether of manners or style, is the crowning result of the highest culture. But the pastorals of Spenser were very different things, different both in the moving spirit and the resultant form from the later ones of Browne or the "Piscatory Eclogues" of Phineas Fletcher. And why? Browne and Fletcher wrote because Spenser had written, but Spenser wrote from a strong inward impulse — an instinct it might be called — to escape at all risks into the fresh air from that horrible

atmosphere into which rhymer after rhymer had been pumping carbonic-acid gas with the full force of his lungs, and in which all sincerity was on the edge of suffocation. His longing for something truer and better was as honest as that which led Tacitus so long before to idealize the Germans, and Rousseau so long after to make an angel of the savage.

Spenser himself supremely overlooks the whole chasm between himself and Chaucer, as Dante between himself and Virgil. He called Chaucer master, as Milton was afterwards to call *him*. And, even while he chose the most artificial of all forms, his aim — that of getting back to Nature and life — was conscious, I have no doubt, to himself, and must be obvious to whoever reads with anything but the ends of his fingers. It is true that Sannazzaro had brought the pastoral into fashion again, and that two of Spenser's are little more than translations from Marot; but for manner he instinctively turned back to Chaucer, the first and then only great English poet. He has given common instead of classic names to his personages, for characters they can hardly be called. Above all, he has gone to the provincial dialects for words wherewith to enlarge and freshen his poetical vocabulary.[1] I look upon the "Shepherd's Calendar"

[1] Sir Philip Sidney did not approve of this. "That same framing of his style to an old rustic language I dare not allow,

as being no less a conscious and deliberate attempt at reform than Thomson's "Seasons" were in the topics, and Wordsworth's "Lyrical Ballads" in the language of poetry. But the great merit of these pastorals was not so much in their matter as their manner. They show a sense of style in its larger meaning hitherto displayed by no English poet since Chaucer. Surrey had brought back from Italy a certain inkling of it, so far as it is contained in decorum. But here was a new language, a choice and arrangement of words, a variety, elasticity, and harmony of verse most grateful to the ears of men. If not passion, there was fervor, which was perhaps as near it as the somewhat stately movement of Spenser's mind would allow him to come. Sidney had tried many experiments in versifica-

since neither Theocritus in Greek, Virgil in Latin, nor Sannazzaro in Italian did affect it." (*Defence of Poesy.*) Ben Jonson, on the other hand, said that Guarini "kept not decorum in making shepherds speak as well as himself could." (*Conversations with Drummond.*) I think Sidney was right, for the poets' Arcadia is a purely ideal world, and should be treated accordingly. But whoever looks into the glossary appended to the *Calendar* by E. K., will be satisfied that Spenser's object was to find unhackneyed and poetical words rather than such as should seem more on a level with the speakers. See also the *Epistle Dedicatory*. I cannot help thinking that E. K. was Spenser himself, with occasional interjections of Harvey. Who else could have written such English as many passages in this *Epistle*?

tion, which are curious and interesting, especially his attempts to naturalize the *sliding* rhymes of Sannazzaro in English. But there is everywhere the uncertainty of a 'prentice hand. Spenser shows himself already a master, at least in verse, and we can trace the studies of Milton, a yet greater master, in the "Shepherd's Calendar" as well as in the "Faery Queen." We have seen that Spenser, under the misleading influence of Sidney[1] and Harvey, tried his hand at English hexameters. But his great glory is that he taught his own language to sing and move to measures harmonious and noble. Chaucer had done much to vocalize it, as I have tried to show elsewhere,[2] but Spenser was to prove

> "That no tongue hath the muse's utterance heired
> For verse, and that sweet music to the ear
> Struck out of rhyme, so naturally as this."

The "Shepherd's Calendar" contains perhaps the most picturesquely imaginative verse which Spenser has written. It is in the eclogue for February, where he tells us of the

> "Faded oak
> Whose body is sere, whose branches broke,
> Whose naked arms stretch unto the fire."

[1] It was at Penshurst that he wrote the only specimen that has come down to us, and bad enough it is. I have said that some of Sidney's are pleasing.

[2] See *My Study Windows*, ii. 236 *seqq.*

It is one of those verses that Joseph Warton would have liked in secret, that Dr. Johnson would have proved to be untranslatable into reasonable prose, and which the imagination welcomes at once without caring whether it be exactly conformable to *barbara* or *celarent*. Another pretty verse in the same eclogue —

> "But gently took that ungently came" —

pleased Coleridge so greatly that he thought it was his own. But in general it is not so much the sentiments and images that are new as the modulation of the verses in which they float. The cold obstruction of two centuries thaws, and the stream of speech, once more let loose, seeks out its old windings, or overflows musically in unpractised channels. The service which Spenser did to our literature by this exquisite sense of harmony is incalculable. His fine ear, abhorrent of barbarous dissonance, his dainty tongue that loves to prolong the relish of a musical phrase, made possible the transition from the cast-iron stiffness of "Ferrex and Porrex" to the Damascus pliancy of Fletcher and Shakespeare. It was he that

> "Taught the dumb on high to sing,
> And heavy ignorance aloft to fly:
> That added feathers to the learned's wing,
> And gave to grace a double majesty."

I do not mean that in the "Shepherd's Calen-

dar" he had already achieved that transmutation of language and metre by which he was afterwards to endow English verse with the most varied and majestic of stanzas, in which the droning old alexandrine, awakened for the first time to a feeling of the poetry that was in him, was to wonder, like M. Jourdain, that he had been talking prose all his life, — but already he gave clear indications of the tendency and premonitions of the power which were to carry it forward to ultimate perfection. A harmony and alacrity of language like this were unexampled in English verse: —

"Ye dainty nymphs, that in this blessed brook
Do bathe your breast,
Forsake your watery bowers and hither look
At my request. . . .
And eke you virgins that on Parnass dwell,
Whence floweth Helicon, the learned well,
Help me to blaze
Her worthy praise,
Which in her sex doth all excel."

Here we have the natural gait of the measure, somewhat formal and slow, as befits an invocation, and now mark how the same feet shall be made to quicken their pace at the bidding of the tune: —

"Bring here the pink and purple columbine,
With gilliflowers;
Bring coronations and sops in wine,
Worne of paramours;

Strow me the ground with daffadowndillies,
And cowslips and kingcúps and lovëd lilies;
The pretty paunce
And the chevisance
Shall match with the fair flowërdelice." [1]

The argument prefixed by E. K. to the tenth Eclogue has a special interest for us as showing how high a conception Spenser had of poetry

[1] Of course *dillies* and *lilies* must be read with a slight accentuation of the last syllable (permissible then), in order to chime with *delice*. In the first line I have put *here* instead of *hether*, which (like other words where *th* comes between two vowels) was then very often a monosyllable, in order to throw the accent back more strongly on *bring*, where it belongs. Spenser's innovation lies in making his verses by ear instead of on the finger-tips, and in valuing the stave more than any of the single verses that compose it. This is the secret of his easy superiority to all others in the stanza which he composed, and which bears his name. Milton (who got more of his schooling in these matters from Spenser than anywhere else) gave this principle a greater range, and applied it with more various mastery. I have little doubt that the tune of the last stanza cited above was clinging in Shakespeare's ear when he wrote those exquisite verses in *Midsummer Night's Dream* ("I know a bank"), where our grave pentameter is in like manner surprised into a lyrical movement. See also the pretty song in the eclogue for August. Ben Jonson, too, evidently caught some cadences from Spenser for his lyrics. I need hardly say that in those eclogues (May, for example) where Spenser thought he was imitating what wiseacres used to call the *riding-rhyme* of Chaucer, he fails most lamentably. He had evidently learned to scan his master's verses better when he wrote his *Mother Hubberd's Tale*.

and the poet's office. By Cuddy he evidently means himself, though choosing out of modesty another name instead of the familiar Colin. "In Cuddy is set forth the perfect pattern of a Poet, which, finding no maintenance of his state and studies, complaineth of the contempt of Poetry and the causes thereof, specially having been in all ages, and even amongst the most barbarous, always of singular account and honor, *and being indeed so worthy and commendable an art, or rather no art, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to be gotten by labor and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the wit by a certain Enthousiasmos and celestial inspiration,* as the author hereof elsewhere at large discourseth in his book called THE ENGLISH POET, which book being lately come into my hands, I mind also by God's grace, upon further advisement, to publish." E. K., whoever he was, never carried out his intention, and the book is no doubt lost; a loss to be borne with less equanimity than that of Cicero's treatise "De Gloria," once possessed by Petrarch. The passage I have italicized is most likely an extract, and reminds one of the long-breathed periods of Milton. Drummond of Hawthornden tells us, "he [Ben Jonson] hath by heart some verses of Spenser's 'Calendar,' about wine, between Coline and Percye" (Cuddie and Piers).[1] These verses are in

[1] Drummond, it will be remarked, speaking from memory,

this eclogue, and are worth quoting both as having the approval of dear old Ben, the best critic of the day, and because they are a good sample of Spenser's earlier verse : —

"Thou kenst not, Percie, how the rhyme should rage;
O, if my temples were distained with wine,
And girt in garlands of wild ivy-twine,
How I could rear the Muse on stately stage
And teach her tread aloft in buskin fine
With quaint Bellona in her equipage!"

In this eclogue he gives hints of that spacious style which was to distinguish him, and which, like his own Fame, —

"With golden wings aloft doth fly
Above the reach of ruinous decay,

takes Cuddy to be Colin. In Milton's *Lycidas* there are reminiscences of this eclogue as well as of that for May. The latter are the more evident, but I think that Spenser's

"Cuddie, the praise is better than the price,"—

suggested Milton's

"But not the praise,
Phœbus replied, and touched my trembling ears."

Shakespeare had read and remembered this pastoral. Compare

"But, ah, Mæcenas is yclad in clay,
And great Augustus long ago is dead,
And all the worthies liggen wrapt in lead"—

with

"King Pandion, he is dead;
All thy friends are lapt in lead."

It is odd that Shakespeare, in his "*l*apt in *l*ead," is more Spenserian than Spenser himself, from whom he caught this "hunting of the letter."

And with brave plumes doth beat the azure sky,
Admired of base-born men from far away." [1]

He was letting his wings grow, as Milton said, and foreboding the "Faery Queen": —

"Lift thyself up out of the lowly dust

. . . . . .

To 'doubtèd knights whose woundless armor rusts
And helms unbruiséd waxen daily brown:
There may thy Muse display her fluttering wing,
And stretch herself at large from East to West."

Verses like these, especially the last (which Dryden would have liked), were such as English ears had not yet heard, and curiously prophetic of the maturer man. The language and verse of Spenser at his best have an ideal lift in them, and there is scarce any of our poets who can so hardly help being poetical.

It was this instantly felt if not easily definable charm that forthwith won for Spenser his never-disputed rank as the chief English poet of that age, and gave him a popularity which, during his life and in the following generation, was, in its select quality, without a competitor. It may be thought that I lay too much stress on this single attribute of diction. But apart from its importance in his case as showing their way to

[1] *Ruins of Time.* It is perhaps not considering too nicely to remark how often this image of *wings* recurred to Spenser's mind. A certain aërial latitude was essential to the large circlings of his style.

the poets who were just then learning the accidence of their art, and leaving them a material to work in already mellowed to their hands, it should be remembered that it is subtle perfection of phrase and that happy coalescence of music and meaning, where each reinforces the other, that define a man as poet and make all ears converts and partisans. Spenser was an epicure in language. He loved "seld-seen costly" words perhaps too well, and did not always distinguish between mere strangeness and that novelty which is so agreeable as to cheat us with some charm of seeming association. He had not the concentrated power which can sometimes pack infinite riches in the little room of a single epithet, for his genius is rather for dilation than compression.[1] But he was, with the exception of Milton and possibly Gray, the most learned of our poets. His familiarity with ancient and modern literature was easy and in-

[1] Perhaps his most striking single epithet is the "sea-shouldering whales," bk. II. 12, xxiii. His ear seems to delight in prolongations. For example, he makes such words as *glorious*, *gratious*, *joyeous*, *havior*, *chapelet* dactyls, and that, not at the end of verses, where it would not have been unusual, but in the first half of them. Milton contrives a break (a kind of heave, as it were) in the uniformity of his verse by a practice exactly the opposite of this. He also shuns a *hiatus* which does not seem to have been generally displeasing to Spenser's ear, though perhaps in the compound epithet *bees-alluring* he intentionally avoids it by the plural form.

timate, and as he perfected himself in his art, he caught the grand manner and high-bred ways of the society he frequented. But even to the last he did not quite shake off the blunt rusticity of phrase that was habitual with the generation that preceded him. In the fifth book of the "Faery Queen," where he is describing the passion of Britomart at the supposed infidelity of Arthegall, he descends to a Teniers-like realism,[1] — he whose verses generally remind us of the dancing Hours of Guido, where we catch but a glimpse of the real earth and that far away beneath. But his habitual style is that of gracious loftiness and refined luxury.

He first shows his mature hand in the "Muiopotmos," the most airily fanciful of his poems, a marvel for delicate conception and

1 "Like as a wayward child, whose sounder sleep
Is broken with some fearful dream's affright,
With froward will doth set himself to weep
Ne can be stilled for all his nurse's might,
But kicks and squalls and shrieks for fell despight,
Now scratching her and her loose locks misusing,
Now seeking darkness and now seeking light,
Then craving suck, and then the suck refusing."

He would doubtless have justified himself by the familiar example of Homer's comparing Ajax to a donkey in the eleventh book of the *Iliad*. So also in the *Epithalamion* it grates our nerves to hear, —

"Pour not by cups, but by the bellyful,
Pour out to all that wull."

Such examples serve to show how strong a dose of Spenser's *aurum potabile* the language needed.

treatment, whose breezy verse seems to float between a blue sky and golden earth in imperishable sunshine. No other English poet has found the variety and compass which enlivened the octave stanza under his sensitive touch. It can hardly be doubted that in Clarion the butterfly he has symbolized himself, and surely never was the poetic temperament so picturesquely exemplified: —

"Over the fields, in his frank lustiness,
And all the champaign o'er, he soarëd light,
And all the country wide he did possess,
Feeding upon their pleasures bounteously,
That none gainsaid and none did him envy.

"The woods, the rivers, and the meadows green,
With his air-cutting wings he measured wide,
Nor did he leave the mountains bare unseen,
Nor the rank grassy fens' delights untried;
But none of these, however sweet they been,
Mote please his fancy, or him cause to abide;
His choiceful sense with every change doth flit;
No common things may please a wavering wit.

"To the gay gardens his unstaid desire
Him wholly carried, to refresh his sprights;
There lavish Nature, in her best attire,
Pours forth sweet odors and alluring sights,
And Art, with her contending doth aspire,
To excel the natural with made delights;
And all that fair or pleasant may be found,
In riotous excess doth there abound.

"There he arriving, round about doth flie,
From bed to bed, from one to the other border,

And takes survey with curious busy eye,
Of every flower and herb there set in order,
Now this, now that, he tasteth tenderly,
Yet none of them he rudely doth disorder,
Ne with his feet their silken leaves displace,
But pastures on the pleasures of each place.

"And evermore with most variety
And change of sweetness (for all change is sweet)
He casts his glutton sense to satisfy,
Now sucking of the sap of herbs most meet,
Or of the dew which yet on them doth lie,
Now in the same bathing his tender feet;
And then he percheth on some branch thereby
To weather him and his moist wings to dry.

"And then again he turneth to his play,
To spoil [plunder] the pleasures of that paradise;
The wholesome sage, the lavender still gray,
Rank-smelling rue, and cummin good for eyes,
The roses reigning in the pride of May,
Sharp hyssop good for green wounds' remedies,
Fair marigolds, and bees-alluring thyme,
Sweet marjoram and daisies decking prime,

"Cool violets, and orpine growing still,
Embathëd balm, and cheerful galingale,
Fresh costmary and breathful camomill,
Dull poppy and drink-quickening setuale,
Vein-healing vervain and head-purging dill,
Sound savory, and basil hearty-hale,
Fat coleworts and comforting perseline,
Cold lettuce, and refreshing rosemarine.[1]

[1] I could not bring myself to root out this odorous herb-garden, though it make my extract too long. It is a pretty

"And whatso else of virtue good or ill,
Grew in this garden, fetched from far away,
Of every one he takes and tastes at will,
And on their pleasures greedily doth prey;
Then, when he hath both played and fed his fill,
In the warm sun he doth himself embay,
And there him rests in riotous suffisance
Of all his gladfulness and kingly joyance.

"What more felicity can fall to creature
Than to enjoy delight with liberty,
And to be lord of all the works of nature?
To reign in the air from earth to highest sky,
To feed on flowers and weeds of glorious feature,
To take whatever thing doth please the eye?
Who rests not pleasëd with such happiness,
Well worthy he to taste of wretchedness."

The "Muiopotmos" pleases us all the more that it vibrates in us a string of classical association by adding an episode to Ovid's story of Arachne. "Talking the other day with a friend (the late Mr. Keats) about Dante, he observed that whenever so great a poet told us anything in addition or continuation of an ancient story, he had a right to be regarded as classical authority. For instance, said he, when he tells us of that characteristic death of Ulysses, . . . we ought to receive the information as authentic, and be

reminiscence of his master Chaucer, but is also very characteristic of Spenser himself. He could not help planting a flower or two among his serviceable plants, and after all this abundance he is not satisfied, but begins the next stanza with "And whatso *else*."

glad that we have more news of Ulysses than we looked for." [1] We can hardly doubt that Ovid would have been glad to admit this exquisitely fantastic illumination into his margin.

No German analyzer of æsthetics has given us so convincing a definition of the artistic nature as these radiant verses. "To reign in the air" was certainly Spenser's function. And yet the commentators, who seem never willing to let their poet be a poet pure and simple, though, had he not been so, they would have lost their only hold upon life, try to make out from his "Mother Hubberd's Tale" that he might have been a very sensible matter-of-fact man if he would. For my own part, I am quite willing to confess that I like him none the worse for being *un*practical, and that my reading has convinced me that being too poetical is the rarest fault of poets. Practical men are not so scarce, one would think, and I am not sure that the tree was a gainer when the hamadryad flitted and left it nothing but ship-timber. Such men as Spenser are not sent into the world to be part of its motive power. The blind old engine would not know the difference though we got up its steam with attar of roses, nor make one revolution more to the minute for it. What practical man ever left such an heirloom to his countrymen as the "Faery Queen"?

[1] Leigh Hunt's *Indicator*, XVII.

Undoubtedly Spenser wished to be useful, and in the highest vocation of all, that of teacher, and Milton calls him "our sage and serious poet, whom I dare be known to think a better teacher than Scotus or Aquinas." And good Dr. Henry More was of the same mind. I fear he makes his vices so beautiful now and then that we should not be very much afraid of them if we chanced to meet them; for he could not escape from his genius, which, if it led him as philosopher to the abstract contemplation of the beautiful, left him as poet open to every impression of sensuous delight. When he wrote the "Shepherd's Calendar" he was certainly a Puritan, and probably so by conviction rather than from any social influences or thought of personal interests. There is a verse, it is true, in the second of the two detached cantos of "Mutability," —

"Like that ungracious crew which feigns demurest grace," —

which is supposed to glance at the straiter religionists, and from which it has been inferred that he drew away from them as he grew older. It is very likely that years and widened experience of men may have produced in him their natural result of tolerant wisdom which revolts at the hasty destructiveness of inconsiderate zeal. But with the more generous side of Puritanism I think he sympathized to the last.

His rebukes of clerical worldliness are in the Puritan tone, and as severe a one as any is in "Mother Hubberd's Tale," published in 1591.[1] There is an iconoclastic relish in his account of Sir Guyon's demolishing the Bower of Bliss that makes us think he would not have regretted the plundered abbeys as perhaps Shakespeare did when he speaks of the winter woods as "bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang":—

> "But all those pleasant bowers and palace brave
> Guyon broke down with rigor pitiless,
> Ne ought their goodly workmanship might save
> Them from the tempest of his wrathfulness,
> But that their bliss he turned to balefulness;
> Their groves he felled, their gardens did deface,
> Their arbors spoil, their cabinets suppress,
> Their banquet-houses burn, their buildings rase,
> And of the fairest late now made the foulest place."

But whatever may have been Spenser's religious opinions (which do not nearly concern us

[1] Ben Jonson told Drummond "that in that paper Sir W. Raleigh had of the allegories of his *Faery Queen*, by the Blatant Beast the Puritans were understood." But this is certainly wrong. There were very different shades of Puritanism, according to individual temperament. That of Winthrop and Higginson had a mellowness of which Endicott and Standish were incapable. The gradual change of Milton's opinions was similar to that which I suppose in Spenser. The passage in *Mother Hubberd* may have been aimed at the Protestant clergy of Ireland (for he says much the same thing in his *View of the State of Ireland*), but it is general in its terms.

here), the bent of his mind was toward a Platonic mysticism, a supramundane sphere where it could shape universal forms out of the primal elements of things, instead of being forced to put up with their fortuitous combinations in the unwilling material of mortal clay. He who, when his singing robes were on, could never be tempted nearer to the real world than under some subterfuge of pastoral or allegory, expatiates joyously in this untrammelled ether: —

> "Lifting himself out of the lowly dust
> On golden plumes up to the purest sky."

Nowhere does his genius soar and sing with such continuous aspiration, nowhere is his phrase so decorously stately, though rising to an enthusiasm which reaches intensity while it stops short of vehemence, as in his Hymns to Love and Beauty, especially the latter. There is an exulting spurn of earth in it, as of a soul just loosed from its cage. I shall make no extracts from it, for it is one of those intimately coherent and transcendentally logical poems that "moveth altogether if it move at all," the breaking off a fragment from which would maim it as it would a perfect group of crystals. Whatever there is of sentiment and passion is for the most part purely disembodied and without sex, like that of angels, — a kind of poetry which has of late gone out of fashion, whether to our gain or not

may be questioned. Perhaps one may venture to hint that the animal instincts are those that stand in least need of stimulation. Spenser's notions of love were so nobly pure, so far from those of our common ancestor who could hang by his tail, as not to disqualify him for achieving the quest of the Holy Grail, and accordingly it is not uninstructive to remember that he had drunk, among others, at French sources not yet deboshed with absinthe.[1] Yet, with a purity like that of thrice-bolted snow, he had none of its coldness. He is, of all our poets, the most truly sensuous, using the word as Milton probably meant it when he said that poetry should be "simple, sensuous, and passionate." A poet is innocently sensuous when his mind permeates and illumines his senses; when they, on the other hand, muddy the mind, he becomes sensual. Every one of Spenser's senses was as exquisitely alive to the impressions of material, as every organ of his soul was to those of spiritual beauty.

[1] Two of his eclogues, as I have said, are from Marot, and his earliest known verses are translations from Bellay, a poet who was charming whenever he had the courage to play truant from a bad school. We must not suppose that an analysis of the literature of the *demi-monde* will give us all the elements of the French character. It has been both grave and profound; nay, it has even contrived to be wise and lively at the same time, a combination so incomprehensible by the Teutonic races that they have labelled it levity. It puts them out as Nature did Fuseli.

Accordingly, if he painted the weeds of sensuality at all, he could not help making them "of glorious feature." It was this, it may be suspected, rather than his "praising love," that made Lord Burleigh shake his "rugged forehead." Spenser's gamut, indeed, is a wide one, ranging from a purely corporeal delight in "precious odors fetched from far away" upward to such refinement as

> "Upon her eyelids many graces sate
> Under the shadow of her even brows," —

where the eye shares its pleasure with the mind. He is court-painter in ordinary to each of the senses in turn, and idealizes these frail favorites of his majesty King Lusty Juventus, till they half believe themselves the innocent shepherdesses into which he travesties them.[1]

In his great poem he had two objects in view: first, the ephemeral one of pleasing the court, and

[1] Taste must be partially excepted. It is remarkable how little eating and drinking there is in the *Faery Queen*. The only time he fairly sets a table is in the house of Malbecco, where it is necessary to the conduct of the story. Yet taste is not wholly forgotten: —

> "In her left hand a cup of gold she held,
> And with her right the riper fruit did reach,
> Whose sappy liquor, that with fulness sweld,
> Into her cup she scruzed with dainty breach
> Of her fine fingers without foul impeach,
> That so fair wine-press made the wine more sweet."
> (Bk. II. c. xii. 56.)

Taste can hardly complain of unhandsome treatment!

then that of recommending himself to the permanent approval of his own and following ages as a poet, and especially as a moral poet. To meet the first demand, he lays the scene of his poem in contemporary England, and brings in all the leading personages of the day under the thin disguise of his knights and their squires and lady-loves. He says this expressly in the prologue to the second book: —

> "Of Faery Land yet if he more inquire,
> By certain signs, here set in sundry place,
> He may it find; . . .
> And thou, O fairest princess under sky,
> In this fair mirror mayst behold thy face
> And thine own realms in land of Faery."

Many of his personages we can still identify, and all of them were once as easily recognizable as those of Mademoiselle de Scudéry. This, no doubt, added greatly to the immediate piquancy of the allusions. The interest they would excite may be inferred from the fact that King James, in 1596, wished to have the author prosecuted and punished for his indecent handling of his mother, Mary Queen of Scots, under the name of Duessa.[1] To suit the wider application of his

[1] Had the poet lived longer, he might perhaps have verified his friend Raleigh's saying, that "whosoever in writing modern history shall follow truth too near the heels, it may haply strike out his teeth." The passage is one of the very few disgusting ones in the *Faery Queen*. Spenser was copying Ariosto; but the Italian poet, with the discreeter taste of his race, keeps

plan's other and more important half, Spenser made all his characters double their parts, and appear in his allegory as the impersonations of abstract moral qualities. When the cardinal and theological virtues tell Dante, —

> "Noi siam qui ninfe e in ciel siamo stelle," —

the sweetness of the verse enables the fancy, by a slight gulp, to swallow without solution the problem of being in two places at the same time. But there is something fairly ludicrous in such a duality as that of Prince Arthur and the Earl of Leicester, Arthegall and Lord Grey, and Belphœbe and Elizabeth.

> "In this same interlude it doth befall
> That I, one Snout by name, present a wall."

The reality seems to heighten the improbability, already hard enough to manage. But Spenser had fortunately almost as little sense of humor as Wordsworth,[1] or he could never have carried his poem on with enthusiastic good faith so far as he

to generalities. Spenser goes into particulars which can only be called nasty. He did this, no doubt, to pleasure his mistress, Mary's rival; and this gives us a measure of the brutal coarseness of contemporary manners. It becomes only the more marvellous that the fine flower of his genius could have transmuted the juices of such a soil into the purity and sweetness which are its own peculiar properties.

[1] There is a gleam of humor in one of the couplets of *Mother Hubberd's Tale*, where the Fox, persuading the Ape

did. It is evident that to him the Land of Faery was an unreal world of picture and illusion, —

"The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil,"

in which he could shut himself up from the actual, with its shortcomings and failures.

"The ways through which my weary steps I guide
In this delightful land of Faery
Are so exceeding spacious and wide,
And sprinkled with such sweet variety
Of all that pleasant is to ear and eye,
That I, nigh ravisht with rare thoughts' delight,
My tedious travail do forget thereby,
And, when I 'gin to feel decay of might,
It strength to me supplies, and cheers my dullëd spright."

Spenser seems here to confess a little weariness; but the alacrity of his mind is so great that, even where his invention fails a little, we do not share his feeling nor suspect it, charmed as we are by the variety and sweep of his measure, the beauty or vigor of his similes, the musical felicity of his diction, and the mellow versatility of his pictures. In this last quality Ariosto, whose emulous pupil he was, is as Bologna to Venice in the comparison. That, when the personal allusions have lost their meaning and the allegory has become a burden, the book should continue to be read

that they should disguise themselves as discharged soldiers in order to beg the more successfully, says, —

"Be you the soldier, for you likest are
For manly semblance *and small skill in war*."

with delight, is proof enough, were any wanting, how full of life and light and the other-worldliness of poetry it must be. As a narrative it has, I think, every fault of which that kind of writing is capable. The characters are vague, and, even were they not, they drop out of the story so often and remain out of it so long, that we have forgotten who they are when we meet them again; the episodes hinder the advance of the action instead of relieving it with variety of incident or novelty of situation; the plot, if plot it may be called, —

> "That shape has none
> Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb," —

recalls drearily our ancient enemy, the Metrical Romance; while the fighting, which in those old poems was tediously sincere, is between shadow and shadow, where we know that neither can harm the other, though we are tempted to wish he might. Hazlitt bids us not mind the allegory, and says that it won't bite us nor meddle with us if we do not meddle with it. But how if it bore us, which after all is the fatal question? The truth is that it is too often forced upon us against our will, as people were formerly driven to church till they began to look on a day of rest as a penal institution, and to transfer to the Scriptures that suspicion of defective inspiration which was awakened in them by the preaching. The true type of the allegory is the Odyssey,

which we read without suspicion as pure poem, and then find a new pleasure in divining its double meaning, as if we somehow got a better bargain of our author than he meant to give us. But this complex feeling must not be so exacting as to prevent our lapsing into the old Arabian Nights simplicity of interest again. The moral of a poem should be suggested, as when in some mediæval church we cast down our eyes to muse over a fresco of Giotto, and are reminded of the transitoriness of life by the mortuary tablets under our feet. The vast superiority of Bunyan over Spenser lies in the fact that we help make his allegory out of our own experience. Instead of striving to embody abstract passions and temptations, he has given us his own in all their pathetic simplicity. He is the Ulysses of his own prose-epic. This is the secret of his power and his charm, that, while the representation of what *may* happen to all men comes home to none of us in particular, the story of any one man's real experience finds its startling parallel in that of every one of us. The very homeliness of Bunyan's names and the every-dayness of his scenery, too, put us off our guard, and we soon find ourselves on as easy a footing with his allegorical beings as we might be with Adam or Socrates in a dream. Indeed, he has prepared us for such incongruities by telling us at setting out that the story was of a dream. The long nights

of Bedford jail had so intensified his imagination, and made the figures with which it peopled his solitude so real to him, that the creatures of his mind become *things*, as clear to the memory as if we had seen them. But Spenser's are too often mere names, with no bodies to back them, entered on the Muses' muster-roll by the specious trick of personification. There is, likewise, in Bunyan, a childlike simplicity and taking-for-granted which win our confidence. His Giant Despair,[1] for example, is by no means the Ossianic figure into which artists who mistake the vague for the sublime have misconceived it. He is the ogre of the fairy-tales, with his malicious wife; and he comes forth to us from those regions of early faith and wonder as something beforehand accepted by the imagination. These figures of Bunyan's are already familiar inmates of the mind, and, if there be any sublimity in him, it is the daring frankness of his verisimilitude. Spenser's giants are those of the later romances, except that grand figure with the balances in the second canto of book v., the most original of all his conceptions, yet no real giant, but a pure eidolon of the mind. As Bunyan rises not seldom to a natural poetry, so Spenser sinks now and then, through the fault of his topics,

[1] Bunyan probably took the hint of the Giant's suicidal offer of "knife, halter, or poison," from Spenser's "swords, ropes, poison," in *Faery Queen*, bk. I. c. ix. 1.

to unmistakable prose. Take his description of the House of Alma,[1] for instance: —

> "The master cook was cald Concoctiön,
> A careful man, and full of comely guise;
> The kitchen-clerk, that hight Digestiön,
> Did order all the achates in seemly wise."

And so on through all the organs of the body. The author of Ecclesiastes understood these matters better in that last pathetic chapter of his, blunderingly translated as it apparently is. This, I admit, is the worst failure of Spenser in this kind; though, even here, when he gets on to the organs of the mind, the enchantments of his fancy and style come to the rescue and put us in good humor again, hard as it is to conceive of armed knights entering the chamber of the mind, and talking with such visionary damsels as Ambition and Shamefastness. Nay, even in the most prosy parts, unless my partiality deceive me, there is an infantile confidence in the magical powers of Prosopopœia which half beguiles us, as of children who *play* that everything is something else, and are quite satisfied with the transformation.

The problem for Spenser was a double one: how to commend poetry at all to a generation which thought it effeminate trifling,[2] and how he,

[1] Bk. II. c. ix.

[2] See Sidney's *Defence*, and Puttenham's *Art of English Poesy*, bk. I. c. viii.

Master Edmund Spenser, of imagination all compact, could commend *his* poetry to Master John Bull, the most practical of mankind in his habitual mood, but at that moment in a passion of religious anxiety about his soul. *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci* was not only an irrefragable axiom because a Latin poet had said it, but it exactly met the case in point. He would convince the scorners that poetry might be seriously useful, and show Master Bull his new way of making fine words butter parsnips, in a rhymed moral primer. Allegory, as then practised, was imagination adapted for beginners, in words of one syllable and illustrated with cuts, and would thus serve both his ethical and pictorial purpose. Such a primer, or a first instalment of it, he proceeded to put forth; but he so bordered it with bright-colored fancies, he so often filled whole pages and crowded the text hard in others with the gay frolics of his pencil, that, as in the Grimani missal, the holy function of the book is forgotten in the ecstasy of its adornment. Worse than all, does not his brush linger more lovingly along the rosy contours of his sirens than on the modest wimples of the Wise Virgins? "The general end of the book," he tells us in his Dedication to Sir Walter Raleigh, "is to fashion a gentleman of noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." But a little further on he evidently has a qualm, as

he thinks how generously he had interpreted his promise of cuts: "To some I know this method will seem displeasant, which had rather have good discipline delivered plainly in way of precepts or sermoned at large,[1] as they use, than thus cloudily enwrapped in allegorical devices." Lord Burleigh was of this way of thinking, undoubtedly, but how could poor Clarion help it? Has he not said,—

> "And whatso else *of virtue good or ill*,
> Grew in this garden, fetcht from far away,
> Of every one he takes and tastes at will,
> And on their pleasures greedily doth prey"?

One sometimes feels in reading him as if he were the pure sense of the beautiful incarnated to the one end that he might interpret it to our duller perceptions. So exquisite was his sensibility,[2] that with him sensation and intellection seem identical, and we "can almost say his body thought." This subtle interfusion of sense with spirit it is that gives his poetry a crystalline purity without lack of warmth. He is full of feeling, and yet of such a kind that

[1] We can fancy how he would have done this by Jeremy Taylor, who was a kind of Spenser in a cassock.

[2] Of this he himself gives a striking hint, where speaking in his own person he suddenly breaks in on his narrative with the passionate cry, —

> "Ah, dearest God, me grant I dead be not defouled."
> (*Faery Queen*, bk. i. c. x. 43.)

we can neither say it is mere intellectual perception of what is fair and good, nor yet associate it with that throbbing fervor which leads us to call sensibility by the physical name of heart.

Charles Lamb made the most pithy criticism of Spenser when he called him the poets' poet. We may fairly leave the allegory on one side, for perhaps, after all, he adopted it only for the reason that it was in fashion, and put it on as he did his ruff, not because it was becoming, but because it was the only wear. The true use of him is as a gallery of pictures which we visit as the mood takes us, and where we spend an hour or two at a time, long enough to sweeten our perceptions, not so long as to cloy them. He makes one think always of Venice; for not only is his style Venetian,[1] but as the gallery

[1] Was not this picture painted by Paul Veronese, for example?

> "Arachne figured how Jove did abuse
> Europa like a bull, and on his back
> Her through the sea did bear: . . .
> She seemed still back unto the land to look,
> And her playfellows' aid to call, and fear
> The dashing of the waves, that up she took
> Her dainty feet, and garments gathered near. . . .
> Before the Bull she pictured wingëd Love,
> With his young brother Sport, . . .
> And many nymphs about them flocking round,
> And many Tritons which their horns did sound."
>
> (*Muiopotmos*, 281–296.)

Spenser begins a complimentary sonnet prefixed to the

there is housed in the shell of an abandoned convent, so his in that of a deserted allegory. And again, as at Venice you swim in a gondola from Gian Bellini to Titian, and from Titian to Tintoret, so in him, where other cheer is wanting, the gentle sway of his measure, like the rhythmical impulse of the oar, floats you lullingly along from picture to picture.

> "If all the pens that ever poet held
> Had fed the feeling of their master's thoughts,
> And every sweetness that inspired their hearts
> Their minds and muses on admirëd themes,
> If all the heavenly quintessence they still
> From their immortal flowers of poesy,
> If these had made one poem's period,
> And all combined in beauty's worthiness;
> Yet should there hover in their restless heads
> One thought, one grace, one wonder at the best,
> Which into words no virtue can digest." [1]

Spenser at his best has come as near to expressing this unattainable something as any other poet. He is so purely poet that with him the meaning does not so often modulate the music of the verse as the music makes great part of the meaning and leads the thought along its pleasant paths. No poet is so splendidly super-

Commonwealth and Government of Venice (1599) with this beautiful verse, —

> "Fair Venice, flower of the last world's delight."

Perhaps we should read "lost"?

[1] Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*, Part I. Act v. 2.

fluous as he; none knows so well that in poetry enough is not only not so good as a feast, but is a beggarly parsimony. He spends himself in a careless abundance only to be justified by incomes of immortal youth.

> "Pensier canuto nè molto nè poco
> Si può quivi albergare in alcun cuore;
> Non entra quivi disagio nè inopia,
> Ma vi sta ogn' or col corno pien la Copia." [1]

This delicious abundance and overrunning luxury of Spenser appear in the very structure of his verse. He found the *ottava rima* too monotonously iterative; so, by changing the order of his rhymes, he shifted the couplet from the end of the stave, where it always seems to put on the brakes with a jar, to the middle, where it may serve at will as a brace or a bridge; he found it not roomy enough, so first ran it over into another line, and then ran that added line over into an alexandrine, in which the melody of one stanza seems forever longing and feeling forward after that which is to follow. There is no ebb and flow in his metre more than on the shores of the Adriatic, but wave follows wave with equable gainings and reces-

[1] "Grayheaded Thought, nor much nor little, may
Take up its lodging here in any heart;
Unease nor Lack can enter at this door;
But here dwells full-horned Plenty evermore."
(*Orl. Fur.* c. vi. 73.)

sions, the one sliding back in fluent music to be mingled with and carried forward by the next. In all this there is soothingness indeed, but no slumberous monotony; for Spenser was no mere metrist, but a great composer. By the variety of his pauses — now at the close of the first or second foot, now of the third, and again of the fourth — he gives spirit and energy to a measure whose tendency it certainly is to become languorous. He knew how to make it rapid and passionate at need, as in such verses as

> "But he, my lion, and my noble lord,
> How does he find in cruel heart to hate
> Her that him loved and ever most adored
> As the God of my life? Why hath he me abhorred?" [1]

or this, —

> "Come hither, come hither, O, come hastily!" [2]

Joseph Warton objects to Spenser's stanza, that its "constraint led him into many absurdities." Of these he instances three, of which I shall notice only one, since the two others (which suppose him at a loss for words and rhymes) will hardly seem valid to any one who knows the poet. It is that it "obliged him to dilate the thing to be expressed, however unimportant,

[1] *Faery Queen*, I. c. iii. 7. Leigh Hunt, one of the most sympathetic of critics, has remarked the passionate change from the third to the first person in the last two verses.

[2] Ibid. II. c. viii. 3.

with trifling and tedious circumlocutions, namely, Faery Queen, II. ii. 44: —

> "'Now hath fair Phœbe with her silver face
> Thrice seen the shadows of this nether world,
> Sith last I left that honorable place,
> In which her royal presence is enrolled.'

That is, it is three months since I left her palace."[1] But Dr. Warton should have remembered (what he too often forgets in his own verses) that, in spite of Dr. Johnson's dictum, poetry is not prose, and that verse only loses its advantage over the latter by invading its province.[2] Verse itself is an absurdity except as an expression of some higher movement of the mind, or as an

[1] *Observations on Faery Queen*, vol. i. pp. 158, 159. Mr. Hughes also objects to Spenser's measure, that it is "closed always by a full-stop, in the same place, by which every stanza is made as it were a distinct paragraph." (Todd's *Spenser*, II. xli.) But he could hardly have read the poem attentively, for there are numerous instances to the contrary. Spenser was a consummate master of versification, and not only did Marlowe and Shakespeare learn of him, but I have little doubt that, but for the *Faery Queen*, we should never have had the varied majesty of Milton's blank verse.

[2] As where Dr. Warton himself says: —

> "How nearly had my spirit past,
> Till stopt by Metcalf's skilful hand,
> To death's dark regions wide and waste
> And the black river's mournful strand,
> Or to," etc., —

to the end of the next stanza. That is, I had died but for Dr. Metcalf's boluses.

expedient to lift other minds to the same ideal level. It is the cothurnus which gives language an heroic stature. I have said that one leading characteristic of Spenser's style was its spaciousness, that he habitually dilates rather than compresses. But his way of measuring time was perfectly natural in an age when everybody did not carry a dial in his poke as now. He is the last of the poets, who went (without affectation) by the great clock of the firmament. Dante, the miser of words, who goes by the same timepiece, is full of these roundabout ways of telling us the hour. It had nothing to do with Spenser's stanza, and I for one should be sorry to lose these stately revolutions of the *superne ruote*. Time itself becomes more noble when so measured; we never knew before of how precious a commodity we had the wasting. Who would prefer the plain time of day to this?

> "Now when Aldebaran was mounted high
> Above the starry Cassiopeia's chair";

or this?

> "By this the northern wagoner had set
> His seven-fold team behind the steadfast star
> That was in the ocean's waves yet never wet,
> But firm is fixt and sendeth light from far
> To all that in the wide deep wandering are";

or this?

> "At last the golden oriental gate
> Of greatest heaven gan to open fair,

And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair
And hurls his glistening beams through dewy air."

The generous indefiniteness, which treats an hour more or less as of no account, is in keeping with that sense of endless leisures which it is one chief merit of the poem to suggest. But Spenser's dilatation extends to thoughts as well as to phrases and images. He does not love the concise. Yet his dilatation is not mere distension, but the expansion of natural growth in the rich soil of his own mind, wherein the merest stick of a verse puts forth leaves and blossoms. Here is one of his, suggested by Homer:[1]—

"Upon the top of all his lofty crest
A bunch of hairs discolored diversly,
With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest,
Did shake, and seemed to dance for jollity;
Like to an almond-tree ymounted high
On top of green Selinus all alone
With blossoms brave bedeckëd daintily,
Whose tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heaven is blown."

And this is the way he reproduces five pregnant verses of Dante:—

[1] *Iliad*, xvii. 55 *seqq*. Referred to in Upton's note on *Faery Queen*, bk. i. c. vii. 32. Into what a breezy couplet trailing off with an alexandrine has Homer's πνοιαὶ παντοίων ἀνέμων expanded! Chapman unfortunately has slurred this passage in his version, and Pope *tittivated* it more than usual in his. I have no other translation at hand. Marlowe was so taken by this passage in Spenser that he put it bodily into his *Tamburlaine*.

"Seggendo in piuma
In fama non si vien, nè sotto coltre,
Senza la qual chi sua vita consuma,
Cotal vestigio in terra di se lascia
Qual fumo in aere ed in acqua la schiuma." [1]

"Whoso in pomp of proud estate, quoth she,
Does swim, and bathes himself in courtly bliss,
Does waste his days in dark obscurity
And in oblivion ever buried is;
Where ease abounds it 's eath to do amiss:
But who his limbs with labors and his mind
Behaves with cares, cannot so easy miss.
Abroad in arms, at home in studious kind,
Who seeks with painful toil shall Honor soonest find.

"In woods, in waves, in wars, she wonts to dwell,
And will be found with peril and with pain,
Ne can the man that moulds in idle cell
Unto her happy mansiön attain;
Before her gate high God did Sweat ordain,
And wakeful watches ever to abide;
But easy is the way and passage plain
To pleasure's palace; it may soon be spied,
And day and night her doors to all stand open wide." [2]

[1] *Inferno*, XXIV. 46–52.

"For sitting upon down,
Or under quilt, one cometh not to fame,
Withouten which whoso his life consumes
Such vestige leaveth of himself on earth
As smoke in air or in the water foam." (Longfellow.)

It shows how little Dante was read during the last century that none of the commentators on Spenser notice his most important obligations to the great Tuscan.

[2] *Faery Queen*, bk. II. c. iii. 40, 41.

Spenser's mind always demands this large elbow-room. His thoughts are never pithily expressed, but with a stately and sonorous proclamation, as if under the open sky, that seems to me very noble. For example, —

> "The noble heart that harbors virtuous thought
> And is with child of glorious-great intent
> Can never rest until it forth have brought
> The eternal brood of glory excellent." [1]

One's very soul seems to dilate with that last verse. And here is a passage which Milton had read and remembered: —

> "And is there care in Heaven? and is there love
> In heavenly spirits to these creatures base,
> That may compassion of their evils move?
> There is: else much more wretched were the case
> Of men than beasts: but O, the exceeding grace
> Of highest God, that loves his creatures so,
> And all his works with mercy doth embrace,
> That blessed angels he sends to and fro,
> To serve to wicked man, to serve his wicked foe!
>
> "How oft do they their silver bowers leave,
> To come to succor us that succor want!
> How oft do they with golden pinions cleave
> The fleeting skies like flying pursuivant,
> Against foul fiends to aid us militant!
> They for us fight, they watch and duly ward,
> And their bright squadrons round about us plant;
> And all for love and nothing for reward;
> O, why should heavenly God to men have such regard?" [2]

[1] *Faery Queen*, I. c. v. 1. [2] Ibid. II. c. viii. 1, 2.

His natural tendency is to shun whatever is sharp and abrupt. He loves to prolong emotion, and lingers in his honeyed sensations like a bee in the translucent cup of a lily. So entirely are beauty and delight in it the native element of Spenser, that, whenever in the "Faery Queen" you come suddenly on the moral, it gives you a shock of unpleasant surprise, a kind of grit, as when one's teeth close on a bit of gravel in a dish of strawberries and cream. He is the most fluent of our poets. Sensation passing through emotion into revery is a prime quality of his manner. And to read him puts one in the condition of revery, a state of mind in which our thoughts and feelings float motionless, as one sees fish do in a gentle stream, with just enough vibration of their fins to keep themselves from going down with the current, while their bodies yield indolently to all its soothing curves. He chooses his language for its rich canorousness rather than for intensity of meaning. To characterize his style in a single word, I should call it *costly*. None but the daintiest and nicest phrases will serve him, and he allures us from one to the other with such cunning baits of alliteration, and such sweet lapses of verse, that never any word seems more eminent than the rest, nor detains the feeling to eddy around it, but you must go on to the end before you have time to stop and muse over

the wealth that has been lavished on you. But he has characterized and exemplified his own style better than any description could do: —

"For round about the walls yclothed were
With goodly arras of great majesty,
Woven with gold and silk so close and near
That the rich metal lurkëd privily
As faining to be hid from envious eye;
Yet here and there and everywhere, unwares
It showed itself and shone unwillingly
Like to a discolored snake whose hidden snares
Through the green grass his long bright-burnished back declares." [1]

And of the lulling quality of his verse take this as a sample: —

"And, more to lull him in his slumber soft,
A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down
And ever drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mixt with the murmuring wind much like the soun
Of swarming bees did cast him in a swoon.
No other noise, nor peoples' troublous cries,
As still are wont to annoy the wallëd town,
Might there be heard: but careless quiet lies
Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies." [2]

In the world into which Spenser carries us there is neither time nor space, or rather it is outside of and independent of them both, and so is purely ideal, or, more truly, imaginary; yet it is full of form, color, and all earthly luxury, and so far, if not real, yet apprehensible

[1] *Faery Queen*, III. c. xi. 28.
[2] Ibid. I. c. i. 41.

by the senses. There are no men and women in it, yet it throngs with airy and immortal shapes that have the likeness of men and women, and hint at some kind of foregone reality. Now this place, somewhere between mind and matter, between soul and sense, between the actual and the possible, is precisely the region which Spenser assigns (if I have rightly divined him) to the poetic susceptibility of impression, —

> "To reign in the air from the earth to highest sky."

Underneath every one of the senses lies the soul and spirit of it, dormant till they are magnetized by some powerful emotion. Then whatever is imperishable in us recognizes for an instant and claims kindred with something outside and distinct from it, yet in some inconceivable way a part of it, that flashes back on it an ideal beauty which impoverishes all other companionship. This exaltation with which love sometimes subtilizes the nerves of coarsest men so that they feel and see, not the thing as it seems to others, but the beauty of it, the joy of it, the soul of eternal youth that is in it, would appear to have been the normal condition of Spenser. While the senses of most men live in the cellar, his "were laid in a large upper chamber which opened toward the sunrising."

"His birth was of the womb of morning dew,
And his conception of the joyous prime."

The very greatest poets (and is there, after all, more than one of them?) have a way, I admit, of getting within our inmost consciousness and in a manner betraying us to ourselves. There is in Spenser a remoteness very different from this, but it is also a seclusion, and quite as agreeable, perhaps quite as wholesome in certain moods when we are glad to get away from ourselves and those importunate trifles which we gravely call the realities of life. In the warm Mediterranean of his mind everything

"Suffers a sea-change
Into something rich and strange."

He lifts everything, not beyond recognition, but to an ideal distance where no mortal, I had almost said human, fleck is visible. Instead of the ordinary bridal gifts, he hallows his wife with an Epithalamion fit for a conscious goddess, and the "savage soil"[1] of Ireland becomes a turf of Arcady under her feet, where the merchants' daughters of the town are no more at home than the angels and the fair

[1] This phrase occurs in the sonnet addressed to the Earl of Ormond and in that to Lord Grey de Wilton in the series prefixed to the *Faery Queen*. These sonnets are of a much stronger build than the *Amoretti*, and some of them (especially that to Sir John Norris) recall the firm tread of Milton's, though differing in structure.

shapes of pagan mythology whom they meet there. He seems to have had a common-sense side to him, and could look at things (if we may judge by his tract on Irish affairs) in a practical and even hard way; but the moment he turned toward poetry he fulfilled the condition which his teacher Plato imposes on poets, and had not a particle of prosaic understanding left. His fancy, habitually moving about in worlds not realized, unrealizes everything at a touch. The critics blame him because in his "Prothalamion" the subjects of it enter on the Thames as swans and leave it at Temple Gardens as noble damsels; but to those who are grown familiar with his imaginary world such a transformation seems as natural as in the old legend of the Knight of the Swan.

"Come now ye damsels, daughters of Delight,
Help quickly her to dight:
But first come ye, fair Hours, which were begot
In Jove's sweet paradise of Day and Night, . . .
And ye three handmaids of the Cyprian Queen,
The which do still adorn her beauty's pride,
Help to adorn my beautifulest bride.

. . . . . .

Crown ye god Bacchus with a coronal,
And Hymen also crown with wreaths of vine,
And let the Graces dance unto the rest, —
For they can do it best.
The whiles the maidens do their carols sing,
To which the woods shall answer and their echo ring."

The whole "Epithalamion" is very noble, with an organ-like roll and majesty of numbers, while it is instinct with the same joyousness which must have been the familiar mood of Spenser. It is no superficial and tiresome merriment, but a profound delight in the beauty of the universe and in that delicately surfaced nature of his which was its mirror and counterpart. Sadness was alien to him, and at funerals he was, to be sure, a decorous mourner, as could not fail with so sympathetic a temperament; but his condolences are graduated to the unimpassioned scale of social requirement. Even for Sir Philip Sidney his sighs are regulated by the official standard. It was in an unreal world that his affections found their true object and vent, and it is in an elegy of a lady whom he had never known that he puts into the mouth of a husband whom he has evaporated into a shepherd the two most naturally pathetic verses he ever penned: —

> "I hate the day because it lendeth light
> To see all things, but not my love to see." [1]

In the "Epithalamion" there is an epithet which has been much admired for its felicitous tenderness: —

> "Behold, whiles she before the altar stands,
> Hearing the holy priest that to her speakes
> And blesseth her with his two *happy* hands."

[1] *Daphnaida*, 407, 408.

But the purely impersonal passion of the artist had already guided him to this lucky phrase. It is addressed by Holiness — a dame surely as far abstracted from the enthusiasms of love as we can readily conceive of — to Una, who, like the visionary Helen of Dr. Faustus, has every charm of womanhood except that of being alive, as Juliet and Beatrice are.

> "O happy earth,
> Whereon thy innocent feet do ever tread!" [1]

Can we conceive of Una, the fall of whose foot would be as soft as that of a rose-leaf upon its mates already fallen, — can we conceive of her treading anything so sordid? No; it is only on some unsubstantial floor of dream that she walks securely, herself a dream. And it is only when Spenser has escaped thither, only when this glamour of fancy has rarefied his wife till she is grown almost as purely a creature of the imagination as the other ideal images with which he converses, that his feeling becomes as nearly passionate, — as nearly human, I was on the point of saying, — as with him is possible. I am so far from blaming this idealizing property of his mind that I find it admirable in him. It is his quality, not his defect. Without some touch of it, life would be unendurable prose. If I have called the world to which he transports us a

[1] *Faery Queen*, I. c. x. 9.

world of unreality, I have wronged him. It is only a world of unrealism. It is from pots and pans and stocks and futile gossip and inch-long politics that he emancipates us, and makes us free of that to-morrow, always coming and never come, where ideas shall reign supreme.[1] But I am keeping my readers from the sweetest idealization that love ever wrought: —

"Unto this place whenas the elfin knight
Approached, him seemëd that the merry sound
Of a shrill pipe, he playing heard on height,
And many feet fast thumping the hollow ground,
That through the woods their echo did rebound;
He nigher drew to wit what it mote be.
There he a troop of ladies dancing found
Full merrily and making gladful glee;
And in the midst a shepherd piping he did see.

"He durst not enter into the open green
For dread of them unwares to be descried,
For breaking of their dance, if he were seen;
But in the covert of the wood did bide
Beholding all, yet of them unespied;
There he did see that pleased so much his sight
That even he himself his eyes envied,
A hundred nakèd maidens lily-white,
All rangëd in a ring and dancing in delight.

[1] Strictly taken, perhaps his world is not *much* more imaginary than that of other epic poets, Homer (in the *Iliad*) included. He who is familiar with mediæval epics will be extremely cautious in drawing inferences as to contemporary manners from Homer. He evidently *archaizes* like the rest.

" All they without were rangëd in a ring,
And dancëd round; but in the midst of them
Three other ladies did both dance and sing,
The while the rest them round about did hem,
And like a garland did in compass stem.
And in the midst of these same three was placed
Another damsel, as a precious gem
Amidst a ring most richly well enchased,
That with her goodly presence all the rest much graced.

" Look how the crown which Ariadne wove
Upon her ivory forehead that same day,
That Theseus her unto his bridal bore,
(When the bold Centaurs made that bloody fray,
With the fierce Lapithes, that did them dismay)
Being now placëd in the firmament,
Through the bright heaven doth her beams display,
And is unto the stars an ornament,
Which round about her move in order excellent;

" Such was the beauty of this goodly band,
Whose sundry parts were here too long to tell,
But she that in the midst of them did stand,
Seemed all the rest in beauty to excel,
Crowned with a rosy garland that right well
Did her beseem. And, ever as the crew
About her danced, sweet flowers that far did smell,
And fragrant odors they upon her threw;
But most of all those three did her with gifts endue.

" Those were the graces, Daughters of Delight,
Handmaids of Venus, which are wont to haunt
Upon this hill and dance there, day and night;
Those three to men all gifts of grace do grant
And all that Venus in herself doth vaunt
Is borrowëd of them; but that fair one
That in the midst was placëd paravant,

Was she to whom that shepherd piped alone,
That made him pipe so merrily, as never none.

"She was, to weet, that jolly shepherd's lass
Which pipëd there unto that merry rout;
That jolly shepherd that there pipëd was
Poor Colin Clout; (who knows not Colin Clout?)
He piped apace while they him danced about;
Pipe, jolly shepherd, pipe thou now apace,
Unto thy love that made thee low to lout;
Thy love is present there with thee in place,
Thy love is there advanced to be another Grace." [1]

Is there any passage in any poet that so ripples and sparkles with simple delight as this? It is a sky of Italian April full of sunshine and the hidden ecstasy of larks. And we like it all the more that it reminds us of that passage in his friend Sidney's "Arcadia," where the shepherd-boy pipes "as if he would never be old." If we compare it with the mystical scene in Dante,[2] of which it is a reminiscence, it will seem almost like a bit of real life; but taken by itself it floats as unconcerned in our cares and sorrows and vulgarities as a sunset cloud. The sound of that pastoral pipe seems to come from as far away as Thessaly when Apollo was keeping sheep there. Sorrow, the great idealizer, had had the portrait of Beatrice on her easel for years, and every touch of her pencil transfigured the woman more and more into the glorified saint. But Elizabeth

[1] *Faery Queen*, VI. c. x. 10–16.

[2] *Purgatorio*, XXIX, XXX.

Nagle was a solid thing of flesh and blood, who would sit down at meat with the poet on the very day when he had thus beatified her. As Dante was drawn upward from heaven to heaven by the eyes of Beatrice, so was Spenser lifted away from the actual by those of that ideal Beauty whereof his mind had conceived the lineaments in its solitary musings over Plato, but of whose haunting presence the delicacy of his senses had already premonished him. The intrusion of the real world upon this supersensual mood of his wrought an instant disenchantment: —

"Much wondered Calidore at this strange sight
Whose like before his eye had never seen,
And, standing long astonishëd in sprite
And rapt with pleasance, wist not what to ween,
Whether it were the train of Beauty's Queen,
Or Nymphs, or Fairies, or enchanted show
With which his eyes might have deluded been,
Therefore resolving what it was to know,
Out of the woods he rose and toward them did go.

"But soon as he appearëd to their view
They vanished all away out of his sight
And clean were gone, which way he never knew,
All save the shepherd, who, for fell despite
Of that displeasure, broke his bagpipe quite."

Ben Jonson said that "he had consumed a whole night looking to his great toe, about which he had seen Tartars and Turks, Romans and Carthaginians, fight in his imagination"; and Coleridge has told us how his "eyes made pic-

tures when they were shut." This is not uncommon, but I fancy that Spenser was more habitually possessed by his imagination than is usual even with poets. His visions must have accompanied him "in glory and in joy" along the common thoroughfares of life and seemed to him, it may be suspected, more real than the men and women he met there. His "most fine spirit of sense" would have tended to keep him in this exalted mood. I must give an example of the sensuousness of which I have spoken: —

"And in the midst of all a fountain stood
Of richest substance that on earth might be,
So pure and shiny that the crystal flood
Through every channel running one might see;
Most goodly it with curious imagery
Was overwrought, and shapes of naked boys,
Of which some seemed with lively jollity
To fly about, playing their wanton toys,
Whilst others did themselves embay in liquid joys.

"And over all, of purest gold was spread
A trail of ivy in his native hue;
For the rich metal was so colorëd
That he who did not well avised it view
Would surely deem it to be ivy true;
Low his lascivious arms adown did creep
That themselves dipping in the silver dew
Their fleecy flowers they tenderly did steep,
Which drops of crystal seemed for wantonness to weep.

"Infinite streams continually did well
Out of this fountain, sweet and fair to see,

The which into an ample laver fell,
And shortly grew to so great quantity
That like a little lake it seemed to be
Whose depth exceeded not three cubits' height,
That through the waves one might the bottom see
All paved beneath with jasper shining bright,
That seemed the fountain in that sea did sail upright.

"And all the margent round about was set
With shady laurel-trees, thence to defend
The sunny beams which on the billows bet,
And those which therein bathëd mote offend.
As Guyon happened by the same to wend
Two naked Damsels he therein espied,
Which therein bathing seemëd to contend
And wrestle wantonly, ne cared to hide
Their dainty parts from view of any which them eyed.

"Sometimes the one would lift the other quite
Above the waters and then down again
Her plunge, as overmasterëd by might,
Where both awhile would coverëd remain,
And each the other from to rise restrain;
The whiles their snowy limbs, as through a veil,
So through the crystal waves appearëd plain:
Then suddenly both would themselves unhele,
And the amorous sweet spoils to greedy eyes reveal.

"As that fair star, the messenger of morn,
His dewy face out of the sea doth rear;
Or as the Cyprian goddess, newly born
Of the ocean's fruitful froth, did first appear;
Such seemëd they, and so their yellow hear
Crystalline humor droppëd down apace.
Whom such when Guyon saw, he drew him near,
And somewhat gan relent his earnest pace;
His stubborn breast gan secret pleasance to embrace.

"The wanton Maidens him espying, stood
Gazing awhile at his unwonted guise;
Then the one herself low duckëd in the flood,
Abashed that her a stranger did avise;
But the other rather higher did arise,
And her two lily paps aloft displayed,
And all that might his melting heart entice
To her delights, she unto him bewrayed;
The rest, hid underneath, him more desirous made.

"With that the other likewise up arose,
And her fair locks, which formerly were bound
Up in one knot, she low adown did loose,
Which flowing long and thick her clothed around
And the ivory in golden mantle gowned:
So that fair spectacle from him was reft,
Yet that which reft it no less fair was found;
So hid in locks and waves from lookers' theft,
Naught but her lovely face she for his looking left.

"Withal she laughëd, and she blushed withal,
That blushing to her laughter gave more grace,
And laughter to her blushing, as did fall.
. . . . . .
Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound,
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear,
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
To read what manner music that mote be;
For all that pleasing is to living ear
Was there consorted in one harmony;
Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

"The joyous birds, shrouded in cheerful shade,
Their notes unto the voice attempered sweet;

The angelical soft trembling voices made
To the instruments divine respondence mete;
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water's fall;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answerëd to all."

Spenser, in one of his letters to Harvey, had said, "Why, a God's name, may not we, as else the Greeks, have the kingdom of our own language?" This is in the tone of Bellay, as is also a great deal of what is said in the epistle prefixed to the "Shepherd's Calendar." He would have been wiser had he followed more closely Bellay's advice about the introduction of novel words: "Fear not, then, to innovate somewhat, particularly in a long poem, with modesty, however, with analogy, and judgment of ear; and trouble not thyself as to who may think it good or bad, hoping that posterity will approve it, — she who gives faith to doubtful, light to obscure, novelty to antique, usage to unaccustomed, and sweetness to harsh and rude things." Spenser's innovations were by no means always happy, as not always according with the genius of the language, and they have therefore not prevailed. He forms English words out of French or Italian ones, sometimes, I think, on a misapprehension of their true meaning; nay, he sometimes makes new ones by unlawfully

grafting a scion of Romance on a Teutonic root. His theory, caught from Bellay, of rescuing good archaisms from unwarranted oblivion, was excellent; not so his practice of being archaic for the mere sake of escaping from the common and familiar. A permissible archaism is a word or phrase that has been supplanted by something less apt, but has not become unintelligible; and Spenser's often needed a glossary, even in his own day.[1] But he never endangers his finest passages by any experiments of this kind. There his language is living, if ever any, and of one substance with the splendor of his fancy. Like all masters of speech, he is fond of toying with and teasing it a little; and it may readily be granted that he sometimes "hunted the letter," as it was called, out of all cry. But even where his alliteration is tempted to an excess, its prolonged echoes caress the ear like the fading and gathering reverberations of an Alpine horn, and one can find in his heart to forgive even such a debauch of initial assonances as —

> "Eftsoones her shallow ship away did slide,
> More swift than swallow shears the liquid sky."

Generally, he scatters them at adroit intervals, reminding us of the arrangement of voices in an

[1] I find a goodly number of Yankeeisms in him, such as *idee* (not as a rhyme); but the oddest is his twice spelling *dew deow*, which is just as one would spell it who wished to phonetize its sound in rural New England.

ancient catch, where one voice takes up the phrase another has dropped, and thus seems to give the web of harmony a firmer and more continuous texture.

Other poets have held their mirrors up to Nature, mirrors that differ very widely in the truth and beauty of the images they reflect; but Spenser's is a magic glass in which we see few shadows cast back from actual life, but visionary shapes conjured up by the wizard's art from some confusedly remembered past or some impossible future; it is like one of those still pools of mediæval legend which covers some sunken city of the antique world; a reservoir in which all our dreams seem to have been gathered. As we float upon it, we see that it pictures faithfully enough the summer clouds that drift over it, the trees that grow about its margin, but in the midst of these shadowy echoes of actuality we catch faint tones of bells that seem blown to us from beyond the horizon of time, and looking down into the clear depths, catch glimpses of towers and far-shining knights and peerless dames that waver and are gone. Is it a world that ever was, or shall be, or can be, or but a delusion? Spenser's world, real to him, is real enough for us to take a holiday in, and we may well be content with it when the earth we dwell on is so often too real to allow of such vacations. It is the same kind of world that Petrarca's

Laura has walked in for five centuries with all ears listening for the music of her footfall.

The land of Spenser is the land of Dream, but it is also the land of Rest. To read him is like dreaming awake, without even the trouble of doing it yourself, but letting it be done for you by the finest dreamer that ever lived, who knows how to color his dreams like life and make them move before you in music. They seem singing to you as the sirens to Guyon, and we linger like him: —

"O, thou fair son of gentle Faery
That art in mighty arms most magnified
Above all knights that ever battle tried,
O, turn thy rudder hitherward awhile,
Here may thy storm-beat vessel safely ride,
This is the port of rest from troublous toil,
The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil.[1]

"With that the rolling sea, resounding swift
In his big bass, them fitly answerëd,
And on the rock the waves, breaking aloft,
A solemn mean unto them measurëd,

[1] This song recalls that in Dante's *Purgatorio* (XIX. 19–24), in which the Italian tongue puts forth all its siren allurements. Browne's beautiful verses ("Turn, hither turn your wingëd pines") were suggested by these of Spenser. It might almost seem as if Spenser had here, in his usual way, expanded the sweet old verses: —

"Merry sungen the monks binnen Ely
When Knut king rew thereby;
'Roweth knightës near the lond,
That I may hear these monkës song.'"

The whiles sweet Zephyrus loud whistelëd
His treble, a strange kind of harmony
Which Guyon's senses softly tickelëd
That he the boatman bade row easily
And let him hear some part of their rare melody."

Despite Spenser's instinctive tendency to idealize, and his habit of distilling out of the actual an ethereal essence in which very little of the possible seems left, yet his mind, as is generally true of great poets, was founded on a solid basis of good sense. I do not know where to look for a more cogent and at the same time picturesque confutation of Socialism than in the second canto of the fifth book. If I apprehend rightly his words and images, there is not only subtle but profound thinking here. The French Revolution is prefigured in the well-meaning but too theoretic giant, and Rousseau's fallacies exposed two centuries in advance. Spenser was a conscious Englishman to his inmost fibre, and did not lack the sound judgment in politics which belongs to his race. He was the more English for living in Ireland, and there is something that moves us deeply in the exile's passionate cry: —

"Dear Country! O how dearly dear
Ought thy remembrance and perpetual band
Be to thy foster-child that from thy hand
Did common breath and nouriture receive!
How brutish is it not to understand
How much to her we owe that all us gave,
That gave unto us all whatever good we have!"

His race shows itself also where he tells us that

> "Chiefly skill to ride seems a science
> Proper to gentle blood," —

which reminds one of Lord Herbert of Cherbury's saying that the finest sight God looked down on was a fine man on a fine horse.

Wordsworth, in the supplement to his preface, tells us that the "Faery Queen" "faded before" Sylvester's translation of Du Bartas. But Wordsworth held a brief for himself in this case, and is no exception to the proverb about men who are their own attorneys. His statement is wholly unfounded. Both poems, no doubt, so far as popularity is concerned, yielded to the graver interests of the Civil War. But there is an appreciation much weightier than any that is applied in mere popularity, and the vitality of a poem is to be measured by the kind as well as the amount of influence it exerts. Spenser has *coached* more poets and more eminent ones than any other writer of English verse. I need say nothing of Milton, nor of professed disciples like Browne, the two Fletchers, and More. Cowley tells us that he became "irrecoverably a poet" by reading the "Faery Queen" when a boy. Dryden, whose case is particularly in point because he confesses having been seduced by Du Bartas, tells us that Spenser had been his master in English. He regrets, indeed, comically enough, that Spenser could

not have read the rules of Bossu, but adds that "no man was ever born with a greater genius or more knowledge to support it." Pope says, "There is something in Spenser that pleases one as strongly in one's old age as it did in one's youth. I read the 'Faery Queen' when I was about twelve with a vast deal of delight; and I think it gave me as much when I read it over about a year or two ago." Thomson wrote the most delightful of his poems in the measure of Spenser; Collins, Gray, and Akenside show traces of him; and in our own day his influence reappears in Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats. Landor is, I believe, the only poet who ever found him tedious. Spenser's mere manner has not had so many imitators as Milton's, but no other of our poets has given an impulse, and in the right direction also, to so many and so diverse minds; above all, no other has given to so many young souls a consciousness of their wings and a delight in the use of them. He is a standing protest against the tyranny of Commonplace, and sows the seeds of a noble discontent with prosaic views of life and the dull uses to which it may be put.

Three of Spenser's own verses best characterize the feeling his poetry gives us: —

"Among wide waves set like a little nest,"

"Wrapt in eternal silence far from enemies,"

"The world's sweet inn from pain and wearisome turmoil."

We are wont to apologize for the grossness of our favorite authors sometimes by saying that their age was to blame and not they; and the excuse is a good one, for often it is the frank word that shocks us while we tolerate the thing. Spenser needs no such extenuations. No man can read the "Faery Queen" and be anything but the better for it. Through that rude age, when Maids of Honor drank beer for breakfast and Hamlet could say a gross thing to Ophelia, he passes serenely abstracted and high, the Don Quixote of poets. Whoever can endure unmixed delight, whoever can tolerate music and painting and poetry all in one, whoever wishes to be rid of thought and to let the busy anvils of the brain be silent for a time, let him read in the "Faery Queen." There is the land of pure heart's ease, where no ache or sorrow of spirit can enter.

END OF VOLUME IV

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